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of Ontario**

Second Session, 41st Parliament

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(Hansard)**

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(Hansard)**

Wednesday 23 November 2016

Mercredi 23 novembre 2016



Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Clerk
Todd Decker

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CONTENTS / TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Wednesday 23 November 2016 / Mercredi 23 novembre 2016

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

Putting Consumers First Act (Consumer Protection Statute Law Amendment), 2016, Bill 59, Mrs. Lalonde / Loi de 2016 donnant la priorité aux consommateurs (modifiant des lois en ce qui concerne la protection du consommateur), projet de loi 59, Mme Lalonde

Mr. Rick Nicholls.....	1721
Miss Monique Taylor.....	1724
Mr. Han Dong.....	1724
Mr. Todd Smith.....	1724
Mr. Michael Mantha.....	1724
Mr. Rick Nicholls.....	1725
Mr. Taras Natyshak.....	1725
Mr. Vic Dhillon.....	1728
Mr. Norm Miller.....	1728
Mr. Michael Mantha.....	1728
Mr. James J. Bradley.....	1729
Mr. Taras Natyshak.....	1729
Hon. David Orazietti.....	1729
Second reading debate deemed adjourned.....	1731

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS / PRÉSENTATION DES VISITEURS

Mr. Todd Smith.....	1731
Mr. Paul Miller.....	1731
Hon. Steven Del Duca.....	1731
Mr. Michael Harris.....	1731
Miss Monique Taylor.....	1731
Mr. Ted McMeekin.....	1731
Mrs. Gila Martow.....	1731
Mr. Percy Hatfield.....	1731
Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne.....	1731
Mr. Randy Pettapiece.....	1731
Ms. Catherine Fife.....	1732
Hon. Reza Moridi.....	1732
Mr. Monte McNaughton.....	1732
Ms. Jennifer K. French.....	1732
Hon. Michael Chan.....	1732
Mr. Lorne Coe.....	1732
Mr. John Vanthof.....	1732
Ms. Ann Hoggarth.....	1732
Ms. Sylvia Jones.....	1732
Ms. Peggy Sattler.....	1732
Ms. Sophie Kiwala.....	1732
Mr. Ted Arnott.....	1732
Mr. Gilles Bisson.....	1732

Mr. James J. Bradley.....	1732
Ms. Laurie Scott.....	1732
Mr. Wayne Gates.....	1732
Mrs. Cristina Martins.....	1732
Mr. Jeff Yurek.....	1732
Hon. David Zimmer.....	1732
Mr. Jim Wilson.....	1732
Mme France Gélinas.....	1732
Hon. Tracy MacCharles.....	1732
Mr. Victor Fedeli.....	1732
Mrs. Lisa Gretzky.....	1732
Hon. Kathryn McGarry.....	1732
Mr. Peter Z. Mileczyn.....	1732
Hon. Dipika Damerla.....	1732
Ms. Sophie Kiwala.....	1733
Mr. Grant Crack.....	1733
Mr. Arthur Potts.....	1733
Ms. Daiene Vernile.....	1733

Report, Financial Accountability Officer

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac).....	1733
------------------------------------	------

Elizabeth Joan Smith

Mr. Monte McNaughton.....	1733
Ms. Peggy Sattler.....	1734
Hon. Deborah Matthews.....	1735
The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac).....	1736

ORAL QUESTIONS / QUESTIONS ORALES

Fundraising

Mr. Steve Clark.....	1736
Hon. Yasir Naqvi.....	1736

By-election in Sudbury

Mr. Steve Clark.....	1737
Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne.....	1737

By-election in Sudbury

Ms. Andrea Horwath.....	1738
Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne.....	1738
Hon. Yasir Naqvi.....	1738

Energy policies

Ms. Andrea Horwath.....	1738
Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne.....	1739

Climate change

Mr. Victor Fedeli.....	1739
Hon. Charles Sousa.....	1740

By-election in Sudbury

Mr. Gilles Bisson.....	1740
Hon. Yasir Naqvi.....	1740

Poverty reduction

Mr. Ted McMeekin	1740
Hon. Helena Jaczek	1741
Hon. Chris Ballard	1741

Climate change

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson	1741
Hon. Glen R. Murray	1741

Mercury poisoning

Mme France G��linas	1742
Hon. Glen R. Murray	1742

Municipal government

Ms. Daiene Vernile	1742
Hon. Bill Mauro	1743

Government advertising

Mrs. Julia Munro	1743
Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne	1743
Hon. Charles Sousa	1744

Health care funding

Ms. Jennifer K. French	1744
Hon. Eric Hoskins	1744

Indigenous relations

Mr. Arthur Potts	1744
Hon. David Zimmer	1744

Highway improvement

Mr. Todd Smith	1745
Hon. Steven Del Duca	1745

Hydro rates

Ms. Catherine Fife	1746
Hon. Glenn Thibeault	1746

Ontario budget

Mrs. Cristina Martins	1746
Hon. Charles Sousa	1746

Visitors

Ms. Soo Wong	1747
The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac)	1747

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS / D  CLARATIONS DES D  PUT  S

Services for the deaf

Mr. Ted Arnott	1747
----------------------	------

Child care

Mr. Peter Tabuns	1747
------------------------	------

Pedestrian Sundays in Kensington Market

Mr. Han Dong	1747
--------------------	------

North Bay Santa Claus Parade

Mr. Victor Fedeli	1748
-------------------------	------

Violence against women

Mr. Jagmeet Singh	1748
-------------------------	------

Anti-bullying initiatives

Mr. John Fraser	1748
-----------------------	------

PKU treatment

Ms. Sylvia Jones	1748
------------------------	------

  ducation postsecondaire en fran  ais

Mme France G��linas	1749
---------------------------	------

Sistering

Mrs. Cristina Martins	1749
-----------------------------	------

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES / RAPPORTS DES COMIT  S

Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills

Mr. Ted McMeekin	1749
Report adopted	1749

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS / D  P  T DES PROJETS DE LOI

**Safe Roundabouts Act, 2016, Bill 72, Mr. Harris /
Loi de 2016 sur la s  curit   des carrefours
giratoires, projet de loi 72, M. Harris**

First reading agreed to	1749
Mr. Michael Harris	1749

**Representation Amendment Act (Wahnapitae First
Nation), 2016, Bill 73, Mme G  linas / Loi de 2016
modifiant la Loi sur la repr  sentation   lectorale
(Premi  re Nation de Wahnapitae), projet de loi 73,
Mme G  linas**

First reading agreed to	1750
Mme France G��linas	1750

**Trans Day of Remembrance Act, 2016, Bill 74,
Ms. DiNovo / Loi de 2016 sur la Journ  e du
souvenir trans, projet de loi 74, Mme DiNovo**

First reading agreed to	1750
Ms. Cheri DiNovo	1750

PETITIONS / P  TITIONS

Hydro rates

Mr. Norm Miller	1750
-----------------------	------

Air-rail link

Ms. Cheri DiNovo	1750
------------------------	------

Go Transit

Mr. Lou Rinaldi	1751
-----------------------	------

Taxation

Mr. Victor Fedeli	1751
-------------------------	------

Logements pour personnes   g  es

M. John Vanthof	1751
-----------------------	------

Government services

Mr. Jim McDonell	1751
------------------------	------

Domestic violence and sexual violence

Ms. Peggy Sattler	1751
-------------------------	------

Sexual violence and harassment

Ms. Daiene Vernile	1752
--------------------------	------

School closures

Mr. Norm Miller 1752

Komoka Provincial Park

Ms. Peggy Sattler 1752

Wind turbines

Mr. Todd Smith 1753

Privatization of public assets

Mr. Wayne Gates 1753

Energy policies

Mr. Victor Fedeli 1753

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR**Building Ontario Up for Everyone Act (Budget Measures), 2016, Bill 70, Mr. Sousa / Loi de 2016****visant à favoriser l'essor de l'Ontario pour tous (mesures budgétaires), projet de loi 70, M. Sousa**

Mr. Victor Fedeli 1754

Mr. Wayne Gates 1761

Mr. Yvan Baker 1761

Mr. Todd Smith 1761

Ms. Peggy Sattler 1762

Mr. Victor Fedeli 1762

Ms. Catherine Fife 1762

Mr. Arthur Potts 1770

Ms. Sylvia Jones 1770

Mr. Wayne Gates 1771

Ms. Daiene Vernile 1771

Ms. Catherine Fife 1771

Second reading debate deemed adjourned 1772

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 23 November 2016

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 23 novembre 2016

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PUTTING CONSUMERS FIRST ACT
(CONSUMER PROTECTION STATUTE
LAW AMENDMENT), 2016

LOI DE 2016 DONNANT LA PRIORITÉ
AUX CONSOMMATEURS (MODIFIANT
DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE
LA PROTECTION DU CONSOMMATEUR)

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 21, 2016, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 59, An Act to enact a new Act with respect to home inspections and to amend various Acts with respect to financial services and consumer protection / *Projet de loi 59, Loi édictant une nouvelle loi concernant les inspections immobilières et modifiant diverses lois concernant les services financiers et la protection du consommateur.*

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It's my pleasure to rise today and to add my remarks to Bill 59, the Putting Consumers First Act. Doesn't that title imply that consumers are currently not put first in Ontario?

But in all seriousness, Bill 59 does seek to make amendments to three acts impacting payday lending: the Payday Loans Act, the Collection and Debt Settlement Services Act and, finally, the Consumer Protection Act.

Before I discuss some of the specific changes found within this bill, I would like to discuss a bit of the background on this in general. Payday lending is a much riskier business than traditional lending as no credit check is required. It means that you can borrow money until your next payday as long as you have an ID and a pay stub. Banks and other financial institutions shield themselves from credit risks to a much higher degree than payday loan institutions. The end result of this is lower fees for borrowing and lower fees in general for customers than what is seen at payday loan facilities.

However, this also means that some individuals are not able to borrow money from what we are privileged enough to call "traditional institutions" and instead have to look elsewhere. They often have nowhere else to go other than payday loans.

As a result of taking on higher risks, 10% of payday loans must be written off. That is a substantially higher percentage than traditional banks deal with.

Currently, the payday lending industry is regulated through a maximum fee on a payday loan. The maximum fee is no more than \$21 on each \$100 borrowed. Although the fee would translate into a very high annual interest rate if a regular loan had the same terms, a payday loan is for a maximum of two weeks and the interest is never compounded.

Bill 59 seeks to make some amendments to the Consumer Protection Act with the intention of helping vulnerable Ontarians. What we do not want to see is the unintended consequence of hurting vulnerable Ontarians as a result of these actions.

The bill would grant the Minister of Government and Consumer Services the power to regulate payday lenders by:

- determining which factors a lender must consider before extending credit;
- capping the amount of money that can be borrowed;
- forcing a disclosure in writing of the evaluation of factors affecting a lender's decision to issue credit;
- banning lenders from contacting customers to offer refinancing; and finally
- prescribing a grace period for rent-to-own contracts.

The thinking behind the first regulatory power, forcing payday lenders to take more factors into account before extending credit, is that certain people should not be eligible for loans because they are vulnerable to getting caught in a cycle of being unable to pay. But is it necessarily helpful to take away the one option that some people have for emergency loans? People seeking these loans are often faced with a very difficult situation where they would be in a world of trouble if they cannot find a bit of extra money quickly.

It's hardly compassionate to take away the last resort for someone who, for example, may be about to be put out on the street if they cannot make rent that month. Or what about someone whose electricity may be turned off if they cannot pay skyrocketing hydro bills? The unfortunate reality is that many of these people are simply trying to survive day to day, or week to week, and just don't have the luxury of being able to plan in advance.

It has been suggested that those who frequently resort to payday loans need to receive credit counselling. Simply limiting their access to payday loans doesn't solve the underlying problem. Part of the problem is that a massive number of good-paying jobs have left the province of Ontario while this government has been in power. I've seen that personally in my riding of Chatham-Kent—

Essex, as well, where we have lost thousands of manufacturing jobs alone over the last decade. Many of the jobs that are being created in Ontario are precarious jobs, meaning that many are working part time or on short-term contracts, so they are unable to properly plan and save for the future.

One of the things that I feel the government must do a better job of is ensuring that young Ontarians have strong financial literacy when they graduate from high school. Ontario students should be able to balance a chemical equation and balance a household budget. It's a critical life skill that has not been focused on enough by our educational system.

A Global News story from late 2014 shed some light on this very issue: "A 2012 study by the Investor Education Fund found only 40% of participating Ontario high school students felt somewhat or very prepared to manage their finances after graduation, and roughly a quarter said their schools gave them most ... of the financial information they needed.

"Sixty-nine per cent said they thought personal finance should be taught in the classroom, according to the study, which was based on an online poll of 400 high school students."

While there has been at least an attempt to teach financial literacy in Ontario, it's simply just not getting the job done. In Ontario the focus in the classroom is largely on the math aspect of money management. But the math aspect is not the issue, in terms of learning how to deal with money properly. There are a lot of very smart people who are great at math but cannot keep a household budget. The concept that you cannot spend more than you make and the danger that comes from getting into debt are sadly lessons that we just don't properly teach to our young people. Instead, we allow them to learn these life-altering lessons most often after trial and error.

Now, we all have a responsibility to ensure that citizens of this province don't get trapped in a vicious, endless cycle of poverty, scraping to get by week to week. That includes doing what we can do to actually create good-paying jobs. That onus falls back on to the province, so that people are less reliant on payday loans and other types of borrowing. We certainly need to do a better job of teaching financial literacy, so people can know the risks ahead of time before they find themselves in a hole that they have no idea how to get out of.

0910

As our critic noted, if there's just one take-away from these debates, I hope that every Ontarian can start to take control of their credit file by requesting a free copy of their credit report from a major credit reporting company. You can request a free copy every six months. These reports describe our vital financial health statistics and are as important to your financial health as regularly seeing a doctor is to your physical health. You won't know what the problems are unless you take a look. That's something that is free for all Ontarians, and I hope that they can, in fact, take advantage of that.

I understand what the government is trying to do with the bill. They're trying to protect the people of this province from getting caught in an endless cycle of debt and mounting interest payments. Perhaps they should reflect on that as the government debt continues to grow and interest payments continue to crowd out essential services and valued programs.

But in our desire to protect the most vulnerable fellow citizens, we may inadvertently be taking away the last hope for emergency funds for these very same people. Reducing consumers' access to legal ways of obtaining emergency cash without providing them with a clear path to financial sustainability is likely to drive them to the illegal loan market, which is far more dangerous.

Mr. Speaker, at this point I would like to turn my attention to another area of this bill. I would like to take this opportunity to get this incredibly important story into the record. If any of my constituents are listening, it will, hopefully, help them protect themselves from potentially falling victim to a door-to-door scam. Surely there are some valuable lessons for people outside of my riding as well.

The following story appeared in the Blackburn News about one and a half months ago, on October 4, 2016. Entegrus is in my riding. "Entegrus Does Not Go Door-to-Door" is what it's entitled.

"In light of some recent fraudulent activity, Entegrus is warning their customers to be careful with the information they provide.

"Director of corporate services Gary Symons says they have received a couple of reports from customers in the Parkhill area of door-to-door activity. He says there have been complaints of people posing as Entegrus employees, asking to see old utility bills."

I quote—this is from Entegrus: "In no way does Entegrus go out asking for bills or anything like that," says Symons. "We don't go door to door asking for anything, as far as sales or bills."

"He adds, situations like this have come up in the past but it's not necessarily a frequent occurrence or one that happens in only one area."

He went on to say, "It seems to be sporadic ... There's really no rhyme or reason, or schedule, if you will, on when this occurs.

"Symons is reminding Entegrus customers, it's important to be careful with the information they provide and ask for validation from the people asking for documents."

You know, Speaker, in the riding of Chatham-Kent—Essex—a great riding—we have a lot of seniors. A lot of times, these door-to-door people will take advantage of a senior. They will try the empathic approach of trying to win them over with "Here, I'm here to help you," and so on. But in fact, when our seniors become vulnerable, they will show them their bills, and the door-to-door person will get the information that they want from that vulnerable senior. As a result, the senior finds themselves in some very serious hot water, as I would call it.

Mr. Speaker, let me reiterate that point again, because it's a key point. For those of you listening in debate here

in the Legislature, or perhaps you're among the dozens of viewers watching the morning debate—maybe that should have been hundreds or thousands watching the morning debate, not just a few people—here's what I have, for all of you listening and watching today: Please, be careful of the information that you provide, and ask for validation from the people asking for documents. If someone comes up to your door and asks to see your information, you can certainly ask them to present theirs before giving them any information. Even at that, I would say be very, very careful.

We all can agree that there are problems or concerns with at least some elements of door-to-door sales, at least among the bad apples that are doing things in an unethical way. A lot of times, I'll see these people come to the door, I'll look at them—and they may be considerably younger than I—and I might say, "Well, this individual is someone's son or someone's daughter. They're just trying to make a living doing what they're doing." But it has to be ethical or else I'll close the door. I might even report them as well.

What does Bill 59 do about this concern? The bill seeks to create a regulation-making power for the minister to void any contract entered into at the door or "any other prescribed place" for the supply of prescribed goods and services unless the consumer solicited the salesperson's visit. It all sounds well and good but, of course, we do want people who are tricked into signing something that they do not understand to be able to save themselves a lot of lost money and, of course, heartache.

That said, the wording of the bill is a little concerning. What would this provision look like in practice? What does it mean to grant the minister the regulation-making power to void a contract entered into at the door or at "any other prescribed place" for the supply of prescribed goods and services unless the consumer solicited the salesperson's visit? This part of the bill gives the minister a blank cheque to ban goods, services and places from the market. It is a case of massive overreach in dealing with a problem that should instead be addressed through education and awareness campaigns.

I would like to stress that the goal of the government here may be a noble one: to protect our most vulnerable citizens from unethical selling practices that could devastate their personal finances. I'm definitely on-board in that case. However, the attempts to solve the problem may create many unintended consequences, and this is perhaps an area of the bill that can be further studied at the committee stage. Perhaps it can be improved upon with consultation and friendly amendments. I'll leave that for the members of the committee to decide.

Another topic Bill 59 seeks to address is home inspections. We all know that buying a home is the largest investment or purchase that most people will ever make. Buying a home is certainly the largest purchase that I've ever made, and it's a purchase that can never be made lightly.

Many consumers rely on home inspection professionals before making this milestone purchase. Consumers

often assume that anyone conducting home inspections is qualified to do so and are often surprised to learn that that's not the case. Currently, there are no province-wide professional standards for home inspectors, nor is there any recourse for a consumer whose home is revealed to be in need of major work following the purchase.

As our critic noted, the Ontario Association of Home Inspectors has experience and expertise coordinating professional standards and education on a voluntary basis. We all hope that the new authority will at least draw upon this pool of knowledge, if not be based upon the association.

Groups such as home inspectors themselves are in favour of these initiatives, as are real estate professionals. Good home inspectors welcome the additional scrutiny that regulation will bring, as it will help separate them from fly-by-night home inspectors who are unqualified or even unethical: "High standards and a clear legal framework in the home inspection industry will ensure home buyers and sellers receive reliable, informative and professional advice when making one of the largest decisions of their lives." That quote comes from the CEO designate of the Ontario Real Estate Association—otherwise known as OREA—Tim Hudak.

OREA was happy to be a member of the volunteer panel of experts who developed a report with 35 recommendations for the home inspection industry. Some of these recommendations were, in fact, incorporated into Bill 59.

0920

On a bit of a side note, we know that the government wants to move forward with making home energy audits mandatory before individuals can sell their homes. Yesterday, in meetings with constituents in the real estate industry, the concern was raised that those conducting home energy audits would not be regulated, which could certainly lead to a whole host of challenges moving forward if each home is required to have an energy audit done.

OREA has suggested making an energy report part of the home inspection process. With the government moving forward with this bill to strengthen consumer protection through the regulation of home inspectors, perhaps this would be the way to go.

As I conclude my remarks, let me reiterate that there are many elements of this bill that we are, in fact, in support of. However, there are other elements of the bill that we have some questions about at this stage, and others that we feel may end up doing more harm than good.

In the case of payday lenders, reducing vulnerable consumers' access to legal ways of obtaining emergency cash without providing them with a clear path to financial sustainability is likely to drive them to unlicensed, foreign lenders who solicit online, or to the illegal debt market, which is far more dangerous. I'm sympathetic to the concerns raised about people getting caught in a vicious cycle of payday loans, but is there a way we can address the known problems within the industry without

taking away the ability for people with nowhere else to turn to come up with emergency cash?

Good intentions do not necessarily lead to good legislation. Creating new problems to solve existing ones could hurt those we seek to help. We need to ensure that the end result of this bill matches the intended goals of the government when it comes to protecting our most vulnerable citizens.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you to the member from Chatham–Kent–Essex for his view on Bill 59.

It was interesting to hear him speak about the concerns that they had regarding the portion on door-to-door sales. Personally myself, I'm glad that there's going to be more input on behalf of the government—or somebody; somebody has to be in control of that. I know many times through my own office, we've had seniors, we've had people with disabilities, we've had all different types of stories where there has been someone at their door and they have forced them into signing a hydro contract or something into electricity; water heaters have been a big problem. We've been able to look to the minister's office to try to get some help, to try to get those contracts cancelled. It's been a lot for my staff to have to do that work, timely, to try to stay on top of it. With there being implementation to help correct those issues—to make sure that there are safeguards for people when they have unsolicited purchases at their door.

The other thing that concerns me about Bill 59 is that it just doesn't go far enough when it comes to payday loans. Eighteen dollars on \$100 actually works out to 390% interest annualization. When our most vulnerable people are using that sector, we're charging them the most interest, when it's actually against the law to charge, I believe, over 60% interest. Here we have 390% interest, but because it's worded differently, they seem to be able to find the loophole to do that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Han Dong: Good morning, Speaker. I'm pleased to respond to the member from Chatham–Kent–Essex's debate. I'm very pleased to hear that we're actually going to have his support on this bill, Bill 59, Putting Consumers First Act.

This is a very important consumer protection bill. It talks about banning unsolicited door-to-door sales.

In my riding, similar to the member from Hamilton Mountain's statement, my staff has been helping seniors. I have one senior who came in with liens put on his property because of two bills for a water heater upwards of five digits. It's a bill over \$10,000. Luckily, we were able to help this senior, along with help from his neighbour, to get those liens off. So this is very much needed in Ontario. No community is immune to this.

Also, this bill, if passed, will create a regulatory body for home inspectors. As you know, I introduced a private member's bill to regulate home inspectors. With the changing landscape in Ontario, with the type of real

estate transactions we've seen in the last 10 or 15 years, we know this service is so valuable to new homeowners because of a lack of experience. Now there is a regulated home inspection service in Ontario they can purchase for a small amount to make sure the investment they are making is exactly what they paid for, and not be caught in some surprises later on.

I ask all members to support Bill 59, which will put forward law protection for consumers.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Todd Smith: It's a pleasure to bring some remarks on behalf of the comments from my colleague from Chatham–Kent–Essex on Bill 59, which touches a number of different areas of concern, from home inspections, door-to-door sales, collections, payday lending, and some other areas.

My concerns about Bill 59 are, while there are problems in all of these different areas that I've discussed, that sometimes the government tends to overreach in certain areas. I think there are some concerns when it comes to door-to-door sales, and certainly—obviously, as members have stated so far in debate this morning—there are some unscrupulous characters out there who are going door to door.

But this also can be a legitimate business, and it is an important employer in our area. I believe there's \$2 billion in economic activity that comes from door-to-door sales in Ontario and Canada. Not everybody out there is a bad apple. This kind of paints the whole industry as being bad. It gives the minister discretion to ban the sale of certain things, and I think that's a dangerous road to go down. So we have to be careful in committee, as we develop the regulations and bring forward amendments on this bill, to make sure that we're doing the best job that we can and putting forward the best piece of legislation.

Perhaps instead of spending as much money as the government is to promote certain programs that they feel are important politically, we could be using the money that they're spending to promote some of the protection that already exists within the Ministry of Consumer Services. There are protections out there that I think a lot of homeowners and residents of Ontario aren't aware exist. So when you do run into an unscrupulous character at the door who is trying to sell you a water heater or some kind of energy scam, you do have protections in place already with the Ministry of Consumer Services that you can access. A lot of people don't know about that.

The other important thing is financial literacy. I don't have enough time to go into great detail, but that would also impact some of the other areas.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Mantha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and good morning to you. There are two points that I want to bring up from the discussions that have been generated here this morning on Bill 59. One of them is that I've always been one to stand where I stand and give credit

where credit is due. On this one, I want to give credit to our member from Kenora–Rainy River for her outstanding work that she's done on the door-to-door sales. In our last sitting, she brought a bill forward in order to eliminate that, and she's done a lot of the legwork. It's nice to see, although this is a government bill, that a lot of the work that she has done over the course of her job, and what she's supposed to do, being responsible to her constituents—that some of that work is reflected in this legislation. So good on her for actually bringing that issue forward and seeing it now possibly come to fruition.

I agree with the member from Hamilton Mountain that we absolutely have to put some type of mechanism in place. I come from an area in northern Ontario where there are a lot of seniors who are there. These door-to-door salesmen go through a very aggressive training in trying to sell you on a vast amount of items: heating equipment, HVAC systems, air conditioners and water heaters. They're very good at what they do. These protections may start alleviating that because a lot of them get into these sales because they're preyed upon, and now they're in a position where they're paying these ludicrous, high prices for these items that they basically don't need. At the end of the day, they're stuck paying this, and they're limited in the income they have. What happens is they're too proud to talk to their children about it to try and get some help to get out of this.

0930

So it's fortunate that when you do sit down with them, either after a Sunday afternoon mass, over at the Tim Hortons coffee or just sitting down and having a chat down by the park, that you're able to pick up on that. That's where my office has been successful in getting these individuals out of these contracts and providing them with help. So it's nice to see that this is going to be included in here.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments. Oh, sorry, the member from Chatham–Kent–Essex has a two-minute response.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Thank you, Speaker. I appreciate that. I want to thank, first of all, the members from Hamilton Mountain, Trinity–Spadina, my colleague the member from Prince Edward–Hastings, as well as the member from Algoma–Manitoulin for their insights and their comments with regard to Bill 59, the Putting Consumers First Act.

I mentioned earlier, Speaker, in my 20-minute leadoff this morning: Is it really putting consumers first? But there are components in this bill that I like and we like as a caucus; we really do. I try to stay positive on these things.

One of the things that I do like, as a matter of fact, is schedule 1, which is all about the home inspector licensing. I think that's a good deal. I think it's a good idea because we don't want to see people being taken advantage of. We also want to support collections and the cool-off period. I think that that's also very, very important.

But my other concern is with regard to door-to-door sales. I've seen it all too often. As a matter of fact, I've

had door-to-door salespeople come to my home and want to talk to my wife and I. Thank goodness I had the discernment to be able to say, "Listen, can you show me who you represent and how long you've been with this company? Tell me about your company," before I sign any of those contracts they want you to sign. But the cooling-off period is something I think a lot of people may not be aware of, and, of course, they will never tell you about that. All they want is your signature on the bottom line. So I think there are some good things in there. I also talked about payday lending.

In just the last few moments that I have here I want to suggest something as well. Financial literacy is an important component that needs to be taught in schools. As I look around this Legislature today, I see some young people in our gallery this morning. These young people are tomorrow's future. As a result, hopefully they will learn that financial literacy as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Good morning. Thank you very much, Speaker. It's always a pleasure to rise on behalf of my awesome riding of Essex and the good people of Essex, particularly on this bill.

Let me commend, first, the government for putting forward a bill that has some real, tangible effect and benefit. It's a rarity that I've seen a bill that actually isn't really completely 100% political or doesn't have five poison pills in it somewhere. So I'm really happy to see a bill come forward that we can debate, we can talk about, and we can learn from each other. I'm learning from my colleagues here, and it's collegial. It's the way that I think this place should operate. So kudos to the government for putting forward something that we can all work towards.

So what does this bill do? It's the Putting Consumers First Act, Bill 59—consumer protection. They put these cute titles in there, "Putting Consumers First," so everybody is going to rally behind this bill and you're going to have a tickertape parade after it passes. I doubt it. But I certainly believe that people will, in general, welcome some of the provisions of the bill. I'm going to give you a brief overview in the 20 minutes that I have here.

The policy objectives of the bill: Firstly, the bill creates a new administrative authority for home inspectors to set regulation and to establish mandatory licensing for home inspections in the province of Ontario. So this is cool and well needed. If you've ever purchased a home—certainly as a first-time homebuyer or, I would imagine, anytime you purchase a home—you want to know what the product is that you're getting. Unless you're a qualified tradesperson or have expertise in the construction of a home and materials, you're going to have a hard time finding the intricacies that could pose some risk to your investment. That's why we hire experts to go through a potential home sale with a fine-tooth comb. In this case, they go through with thermal detectors to detect cold air penetration or warm air leakage. They go through your piping system with cameras to see if there are any leaks in your plumbing. They go through

with high-tech mechanisms to detect the efficiency of your home. This is an area that is really important, and it has become more and more high-tech. And it's really good value; I mean, you pay \$300 and it could protect you from making one of the worst investments and worst mistakes of your life.

In fact, Speaker, if you've turned on the TV any time in the last 10 years, you would have seen that Mike Holmes has made a career on television uncovering the failures of some home inspectors when they have worked for consumers. You'll see Mike Holmes walk into a home on behalf of a family and pull apart one piece of drywall, take a look at the knob-and-tube electrical system, and inevitably you'll see Mike Holmes say those words that we've all come to anticipate: "Rip it up. Tear it up. Tear the whole thing down." Then, we've got half an hour of Mike Holmes putting up nice new stuff, the way it's supposed to be done.

Certainly, we can trust Mike Holmes to do that type of inspection and to do that type of good work because the cameras are there and, you know, you've got a record. That isn't always the case when home buyers require the service or use the service of home inspectors. Sometimes they miss stuff. Sometimes they aren't actually qualified to do it. That's why I think that this portion of the bill is much needed and should be welcomed by those who are in the industry as home inspectors: because it will legitimize that service, and certainly make it easier for people to be confident in what they're purchasing.

The second part of the bill regulates a class of debt collectors that has not been previously captured under the Consumer Protection Act, 2012. That has to do with debt collected on contracts that would be signed through door-to-door sales. These are tied in; the third provision regulates and bans certain door-to-door high-pressure sales tactics.

On the surface, when we think about those high-pressure salespeople that show up at the door, they ask to see your bills and they tell you immediately that they can lower your electricity bills or your hot water bill. If you'll just let them in the house and sit down with them, you know, "We can make life a lot cheaper for you."

Of course, they understand that their message is a little bit easier to get through to people who are unsuspecting and may be vulnerable in that sense. So there is a predatory aspect to some of these tactics, and we have to be cognizant of it. We have to be vigilant for the sake of the people in our communities, because we have heard those horror stories of folks who have been taken advantage of and had liens put against their homes because they've entered into high-interest-rate contracts where they had no idea what they were signing.

So I get that. I welcome these provisions. I think it's a good thing. I think it's about time. But I do agree with something that my colleague from—

Miss Monique Taylor: Chatham–Kent–Essex?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: No, my colleague from Prince Edward–Hastings. You said something great, Todd. Let's make sure that we're not banning everybody that comes to the door, because I can remember—let's see who

remembers the Kirby vacuum salespeople. Did anybody ever have a Kirby vacuum salesperson come to their door? Did anybody sell Kirby vacuums?

Miss Monique Taylor: My mom bought a Kirby.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Okay, these things were awesome. People would show up at the door. I remember the guy came to my mom and dad's house, and we all—

Hon. Deborah Matthews: They'd vacuum your bed.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: They would vacuum your mattress and show you what they would pick up from that thing. You would never want to sleep on your mattress again. It would traumatize you. But these vacuums were real good. They'd vacuum your whole house. The vacuums, granted, were pretty expensive in the day. I think they were probably 600 bucks or something like that. Who could spend 600 bucks on a Kirby vacuum? But my goodness, they came in and you got a tangible product for a set price. There was no messing around. It was pretty cut and dried. We have to ensure that we don't eliminate that portion of sales completely.

0940

We can get anything on the Internet. We can research, and many consumers do their due diligence before they make a purchase. We could find a Kirby vacuum on the Internet, I'm sure. But more and more people want to have that human interaction. They want to talk to a real person about the product that they're about to buy. It may be unsolicited, but consumers should be fully aware that they have no obligation to even answer the door, and definitely no obligation to invite people into their homes. So I think this is going to take some real nuancing on the part of the government, to find out how we protect consumers but we still don't eliminate a really important portion of our local economies.

In the springtime, we'll have students come out—an enterprising student in my community will buy an aerator for the lawn, and they'll show up on the block with an aerator on a trailer and knock at the door and say, "I'm doing your neighbour's yard. Would you like your yard aerated?" That's when you're reminded that maybe it's time to get your yard aerated. We've got to ensure that they still have the ability to knock on our door and say—it's unsolicited, but definitely providing a service that doesn't have a contract that's going to potentially lead you into losing your home.

So that part, again, I'm pleased to see happen.

The last portion of the bill sets forth some regulation of the payday loan industry. Mostly, it downloads powers to regulate the industry onto municipalities. What is a payday loan, and why have these types of loans exploded in our communities in Ontario and across the country? I think they are an indicator of the overall health of our economy. When you see an explosion of payday loans—the premise is that you're going to bridge your income just until the next payday. That's what they typically are. Well, that assumes that you have a payday at some portion of the upcoming week or month. More and more, people who rely on these payday loans don't have that stability of income. They're part-time, precarious

workers with no benefits. It is indicative of a vulnerable society and a vulnerable economy when you have an explosion of these types of lenders. The work that we should be doing here in identifying the perpetrators or the—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I think we've got about eight sidebars going here, and I'm having trouble hearing the person speaking. So if we could cut it back a little bit, I'd appreciate it.

The member from Essex, continue.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Thank you, Speaker.

The work that we should be focused on in identifying and addressing the predatory payday lending industry takes us back to Scripture: kicking the moneylenders out of the temple, as is stated in Scripture. This is the work that we're doing. It's good work, and it's just work.

Let's look at the whole problem. Let's look at what types of jobs are being created out there in our economy. Are they full-time employment? Do they provide benefits? Do they allow people to sustain a decent livelihood and a decent standard of living?

I would say we are on the decline, and there are a whole host of factors that this government can do to make it better. There are things that they have done to exacerbate the problem. There are issues around multilateral free-trade agreements that have led to the degradation of our economy. This is a grand picture thing. This is on the macro level but, of course, this bill deals with the micro. It simply gives municipalities the ability now to identify where payday loan agencies and companies can set up and to potentially prohibit them.

There are many in our communities who have identified these issues for a long time. Our deputy leader, the member from Bramalea-Gore-Malton, has used a lot of his energy in this place to combat the issue of predatory payday lending. We welcome the initiatives on the part of the government.

There are people in our communities who are doing the work on the ground that we aren't. I would point to the credit union industry in Ontario that has identified that they can play a role in supporting people who require these bridge loans, these small loans, in providing what would be a rational, reasonable interest rate, so a shout-out here to the Windsor Family Credit Union in my riding, WFCU, who just recently initiated a financial product called SmarterCash. SmarterCash simply means that as a member of the WFCU, you can access a small bridge loan of \$300 for \$4.26, not the 20% interest rate that we're seeing or, actually, the 390% annualization that we see through payday loan agencies—so something reasonable, something that doesn't put people in the hole and doesn't get them in this vicious cycle of not being able to get out of a payday loan. We definitely welcome that provision, but we do believe that the government could go further in supporting vulnerable people and protecting consumers.

Don't take our word on it, Speaker. Take the word of Tom Cooper, who is with the Hamilton Roundtable for

Poverty Reduction. He has been an outspoken critic of the payday loan industry and their predatory lending practices, particularly as it impacts low-income residents in Hamilton, as it impacts low-income residents in Windsor and in Thunder Bay and in Toronto and all parts around the province of Ontario. Tom has been critical of this government's lack of action on this issue to date, and he doesn't think this bill goes far enough. I would agree, certainly, on this provision.

Tom would like to see the government put a hard cap on the rates these payday lending agencies are able to put onto their loans, and he wants suppression and penalties for misleading industry advertising. Grudgingly, I believe Tom is supportive of at least this initiative.

Let me thank Tom for the work that he has done in advocating on this issue. I would agree: Why not a hard cap? Let's realize that at some point the practice is not only predatory; it's abusive. It doesn't make economic sense for us and for consumers out there. We can do more. We can show leadership. We should show leadership. I think it would be welcome. It certainly wouldn't be welcome by the payday lending industry; they wouldn't be too happy if we did put a hard cap on it. But you know who would be? The vast majority of the province of Ontario and the people who require payday loans.

Is this the heavy hand of the government coming down on industry? You're damn right it is. It should be, because these agencies are causing pain and suffering for people who are already vulnerable. We would call on the government to take a serious look at that. Let's take a serious look at our overall system when it comes to supporting those who are disadvantaged and vulnerable.

I know the government has an initiative that, in conjunction with the federal government, is looking at a guaranteed annual income. I think it's time to have that conversation. I think there are administrative savings there, but there are also pitfalls. We've seen some right-wing governments go down this same path, only to slash benefits for the most vulnerable and eliminate jobs in administration just for the sake of eliminating them, not because there was a redundancy, but eliminating the valuable work that public servants do in supporting low-income people in those jurisdictions. I don't want to see that. We certainly don't want to see that. I don't think Senator Hugh Segal wants to see that.

Interjection.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: That's wonderful news. It certainly could go a long way.

0950

On the other end of addressing vulnerable people and addressing poverty, I will give another shout-out to a wonderful group headed up by the impressive, fantastic Adam Vasey, who is a friend of mine, who I don't get to hang out enough with, but I see the work he's doing. Adam Vasey is an activist in Windsor who holds a law degree, who holds a master's in social work and who has used his talents and his intelligence, and dedicated his life to helping address the issue of poverty.

He is an anti-poverty crusader in our community. He's done a lot of work. Right now, he is helping to identify and to recognize employers in our communities that pay a living wage. Employers are clamouring to get in touch with Adam to say, "Hey, we're paying a living wage." In Windsor and Essex county—forgive me, Adam, but I think you've pegged the living wage at about \$16.36. I hope I'm close; I don't know why I'm so specific, but it's around there. Adam is saying this is where we have to be. Pay a living wage. Allow people to have a sustainable income.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: He should run for public office.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: He should be the Prime Minister of Canada, is what he should be. I would champion his candidacy because he is on track, he's on the right path and he's reasonable.

The work that Adam Vasey is doing, and the Tom Coopers out there, can eliminate our need for payday loans completely. If we had an economy that took care of people and was sustainable, supported workers and provided benefits, and we didn't rely on part-time, precarious work that gave no benefits, we would cure a lot of these socio-economic ills that we have to deal with each and every day.

That's the big picture; that's the job that I think we're all tasked with to do here and to be cognizant of. I'm pleased to have the ability to do that on behalf of our party and on behalf of our constituents. I thank you for the time, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Todd Smith): Questions and comments?

Mr. Vic Dhillon: Good morning, Speaker. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on this bill, Bill 59, Putting Consumers First Act.

One of the things that we are attempting to do with this bill is to address the payday loans industry. Every day when I go home, I see this sign. It says, "\$100 for \$20." Well, someone like me, who has a relative understanding of finance, knows that that's too good to be true, but there are others in my community of Brampton West, which is a predominantly South-Asian-populated riding—people who are newcomers to Brampton and to Ontario who don't know. They do fall for the harsh tactics, I would say, of these businesses. They end up going in, thinking they are going to get \$100 for \$20, and end up signing a whole bunch of papers that they probably do not understand, which can often lead to financial ruin. I've had that situation brought to my attention many times, as I'm sure a lot of my other colleagues in this House have.

The other very important element of this bill is the banning of door-to-door sales. Again, I'm sure most of my colleagues have probably had constituents approach them with complaints of companies who have told them something, but have actually given them something else and have made them sign on the dotted line, which ends up with them being in debt for thousands and thousands of dollars. In some cases, we're able to help them out, but in others, unfortunately, we are not.

So we're going to go ahead and, with the support of the House, make sure that we address these very important issues.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member for Parry Sound—Muskoka.

Mr. Norm Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to respond to the speech from the member from Essex on Bill 59, An Act to enact a new Act with respect to home inspections and to amend various Acts with respect to financial services and consumer protection.

I want to briefly talk about the home inspection part of that act. What it will do is license home inspectors, and I do support that. In fact, yesterday I met with the Ontario Real Estate Association, and we talked about home inspection. They support licensing home inspection, as well. Buying a house is the biggest purchase most of us make. Most of us are not experts in plumbing, electrical work, roofs, insulation etc. That's why you count on—and it's the common practice nowadays to hire a home inspector to come and do a detailed look at your home and do a report.

I will say in my recent purchases in buying and selling a home that I've done in the last 15 years, I've used a home inspector and it's proved very worthwhile. In 2005, when we bought our home in Vankoughnet, we had a home inspector come in and inspect the home. He actually missed that the oil furnace was cracked. When we went to get it serviced, Muskoka Mechanical at the time said that we needed a new furnace. Well, the home inspector actually came through for a good part of the cost of that new furnace without me having to do anything to require them to do so—a real positive experience. I think people do, though, need to have confidence in their home inspectors when they're making this huge purchase.

I hope the bill doesn't create unnecessary red tape. I read the section regarding needing a written contract, and the contract must comply with requirements prescribed by regulation. I just worry that they're going to make unnecessary steps and create unnecessary red tape in that part of the bill, but our party does support licensing home inspectors, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Algoma—Manitoulin.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I always enjoy being in the House with the member from Essex when he speaks. He speaks from the heart, and he relates everything back to his riding, which is something that I pride myself on. Again, it's always a pleasure to stand here on behalf of the good people of Algoma—Manitoulin.

He raised three really important points. One is the role of the inspectors and what that is going to look like. He did bring up the Mike Holmes show; I'm a big fan of that show. You always watch it and you're always looking for when that problem is going to be found. When you look at that, there has to be a consistency with those inspectors so that if an inspector is doing it in house A and house B, there is a process that is going to be followed and that is

going to be consistent so that we have appropriate reports that are going to be given in those inspections in order to be fair to both the buyer and the seller of that home.

He brought up the discussions on the door-to-door sales and the tactics that are being used at that door. I brought that up in a brief conversation that we had earlier on the previous bill. I commended the member from Kenora–Rainy River, who deserves a lot of the credit for the work that she has done on that. But I want to let the member know that I still have my little Kirby. I call it “my little piggy,” by the way.

The predatory payday industry—and he used that word very well: predatory. When you look at what is happening and when you look at why that industry is flourishing, that’s where we should be challenging ourselves to have that greater discussion. Why do we need that industry out there? It’s because people are not getting that living wage; because people are hurting at home; because people are having a hard time making ends meet; because people are having to choose between paying their hydro or putting food in their cupboard or getting their full prescription or getting to that next appointment.

I want to thank the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton as well, who has championed this issue—and, again, two of our members for their work. Their tenacity is finally coming to fruition in this bill. I want to commend the member from Essex; I always enjoy hearing him.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from St. Catharines.

Mr. James J. Bradley: I’m delighted to offer a few comments on this. I was really pleased when this legislation was brought forward because I have been badgering my colleagues who have had this position from time to time—

Interjection: Relentlessly.

Mr. James J. Bradley: Relentlessly—to bring in legislation of this kind because I’m noting through the constituency office, which we all know is a good gauge of what people are feeling, the number of people who are being duped by door-to-door sales. It doesn’t mean everybody, but there are so many instances where they are using false information to get in the door. They come in with some kind of suit on and it looks like they’re from the government. They will say, “We have to inspect your furnace,” or “Let’s see your bill,” and they keep bullying the people. Some people are vulnerable, particularly people who are accommodating of others, who want to be friendly, and they end up signing contracts which are very costly to them.

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I know there are some people expressing caution, but I’m going to tell you I have become infuriated. My own temper rises when I read in the constituency notes stories of people who have come to the office or contacted the office, or who I’ll see in the street and who will tell me. It’s often a younger person talking about a senior citizen who is very trusting.

Next, these loan things. I’ve been in your city of Hamilton. You look down the street and you can’t believe how many of these loan sharks—sorry, loan officers—there are, with great advertising for people. The most vulnerable people, the people who shouldn’t be getting their money there, are getting it there. Mind you, the banks and the credit unions, who make some efforts, should make even greater effort to help those people.

Lastly, the home inspectors: That’s exceedingly important, so that people don’t get a surprise.

I’m pleased with this legislation. I might even go farther than this legislation, but certainly I am supporting it at this time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member for Essex has two minutes.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Thanks to the member from Brampton West. He spoke about the large South Asian community that he has, and the vulnerabilities built into that community because of language barriers and cultural nuances. I thank him for the work he has done.

The member from Parry Sound–Muskoka, and the member from Algoma–Manitoulin, who has one of those Kirbys—they’re indestructible. So I guess that was a good deal when you bought that thing, your “little piggy” who cleans up after you. That’s great. Bring it over to my house anytime. That would be wonderful.

And the member for St. Catharines, who rightly identified some of the positive things in this bill: Speaker, I had to chuckle a little bit at the comments from the member of St. Catharines, because when it came to door-to-door sales tactics he said, “We have to prohibit the use of false information to get in the door.” I think if that’s the case, then it will eliminate the entire Liberal election plan for the next election campaign, because when they knock on the door and they try to get in the door, my goodness.

All kidding aside, Speaker, it’s kind of rich to hear that language coming from a politician. They want to prohibit getting false information to the door, so I hope that’s the case. I hope he’s really sincere about doing that, because we would be well served as constituents and the electorate would be well served.

But I digress, Speaker. I’m supportive of the bill. Our caucus is supportive of the bill. We’re going to add as much as we can at the committee stage to make it stronger to protect even more people and to raise those issues that I think we’re all passionate about, to ensure that there’s fairness and justice in our economy at every level. Again, I thank you for the time and I thank the members for their attention.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Hon. David Oraziotti: I’m certainly pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 59, Putting Consumers First Act. I would say to the member opposite, as passionate as he was about his comments, that it’s important that all individuals who are elected or seeking election represent themselves well and accurately at the door. I know he’s committed to doing that, Speaker, and wouldn’t do

anything other than give all of the facts to a constituent at the door.

But, Speaker, I want to focus on the legislation at hand, because that's why we're here today, to talk about this important issue. I would like to spend a few minutes on each of the areas of the legislation: banning door-to-door sales in certain areas of home products, home inspections and, obviously, payday lending.

Certainly, over the last several years it was a privilege to be in this ministry, in the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services. I know first-hand the challenges that individuals face on these issues, and I certainly advocated for and supported the items that are before us today in this legislation, which I think are all very important and needed.

When we talk about door-to-door sales, we know—and as representatives in our riding, we've all heard constituents talk to us, whether they've talked to us face-to-face or called us at our constituency office, about contracts they were in where they felt that perhaps somebody did not completely represent all of the elements of the contract and all of the costs that they would have to bear when they got into this contract. And they could not believe how much they had to pay and how difficult it was to cancel this type of contract.

I would say to that sector and those individuals who are out there, for example, claiming to be there on behalf of the government or the municipality—because that has happened. We have certainly had those incidents take place. That's really unfair to consumers and residents and, in particular, to our senior citizens who are trusting individuals, by and large, willing to give someone the time at their doorstep and often enter into a contract mistakenly because they're not given all of the information.

Now, I think we all know that there are many good organizations that go door to door. There are many charitable groups, for example, heart and stroke, the cancer society, the kidney foundation, the Girl Guides—all of these organizations. So we want to continue to ensure that all of these organizations have the opportunity to go door to door and to talk to folks in their community. What we want to stop is the type of action where individuals in some organizations misrepresent who they are, why they're there and what it will cost to enter into an agreement.

I'm very supportive of this. I want to commend the current minister for her action in this regard, and I also want to commend MPP Yvan Baker for his work and his advocacy on this issue. This is a really important issue. We've all faced these challenges in our constituency offices and I think, quite frankly, there is broad public support for the action we're taking in regard to this area of the door-to-door sales.

The other thing I like about the legislation that I'm very pleased to see, as these organizations continue to move from one product to another and reinvent themselves to find something else that they can sell to a consumer and perhaps not be completely upfront about that, is that we have the ability to continue to add specific

areas to the legislation, through regulation, to grapple with those challenges. I think, in that sense, it's a very progressive piece of legislation.

With regard to home inspectors, this is fundamentally important to the work that we're doing in terms of consumer protection. Having had the opportunity over the last number of years to talk with, for example, Mike Holmes—he was up in Sault Ste. Marie at Sault College when they launched a home inspection program—you look at this sector, and anybody with a flashlight and a business card can call themselves a home inspector. That is the reality of this. It is the Wild West. When you talk about a purchase that someone is going to make, the largest investment in their life, that they're likely putting their entire savings into and will continue to pay for for many years to come, they want to make sure that they're making a good, sound, well-informed decision that's in the interest of them and their family.

When you look at all the regulatory components that go into that transaction, whether it's the regulations that a real estate agent is under, the regulations that lawyers comply with or the regulations that the banking industry complies with, you have an individual who is validating the structural integrity and the merits of the asset that's being purchased completely unregulated. Really, it is a weak link in the process where someone would go through a transaction to purchase a home. That is really a loophole, if you will, that we need to close to ensure that individuals know and understand the value of a home inspection.

If you go back, say, 30 years in Ontario, most real estate agents would tell you that the likelihood of someone asking for, requesting or paying for a home inspection was less likely than it is today. It's something that's far more common, and because it's more common, it's been helpful, but there are still instances where individuals are purchasing homes and that structural integrity is not protected in that transaction. That's why it's so important to do this.

I know there are folks in this sector who I've spoken to who have been very, very strong advocates with regard to this. There have been a number of reviews on this, an expert panel that the ministry convened, making 35 recommendations in their report, a code of ethics, minimum qualifications, these types of measures, which are all very important in helping to regulate the home inspector sector. So I wholeheartedly endorse this part of the act. I think it's very positive and will help to continue to raise the bar with respect to home inspections and the purchase of real estate in Ontario.

Just one more point I want to make on this issue is the issue around insurance and whether or not that should be mandatory. One of the challenges, certainly, that I recall in this sector is that there are those individuals for whom this is their full-time position. The rates that they charge, the income that they make is something that is sustainable for them, and they are able to take out insurance that would help to further protect the home inspector.

There are other parts of the province where that is not necessarily the reality, where individuals are providing

the service on a part-time basis. They have the skills, they have the ability, but for them to be able to pay the full cost of insurance—it's a different environment when they're doing this on an irregular basis or on a very part-time basis and may have other employment that's their primary.

We don't want to prevent individuals from participating in this field of work. We also don't want to prevent an individual from gaining access to a home inspector. That's why we're moving forward with the legislation the way it's worded. I think it's important, as long as individuals recognize that they're getting a home inspector, that either they have to disclose that they have insurance or that they do not have insurance, so they know exactly the standard for which they're paying for that home inspection.

Last point: I just want to speak briefly about the payday lending environment and the predatory environment of payday lending in the province of Ontario. Granted, they provide a service, and for some people, this is absolutely essential, that they be able to access these types of funds; traditional means may be more difficult. But what we need to do is ensure that through legislation, in every way, shape and form that we can, we protect consumers.

You know, Speaker, I appreciate your comments. I know that the member from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek—in fact, Speaker, yourself—had said, “I commend the government ... for pushing this through, because this is long overdue, and I think it's going to save a lot of anguish for a lot of people in our province.”

Speaker, you're quite right. There are comments from all sides of the House here saying that we need to move forward with these particular initiatives, so I thank you for your support on this. I think that—

Interjection.

Hon. David Oraziotti: No, it's a well-thought-out comment, and I commend the Speaker for that.

This is why we need to move forward. I'm optimistic that we'll have support from all sides of the House—not to pre-judge what the outcome may be. I fully support the legislation and I think we need to pass it as soon as we can.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): It being close to 10:15, this House stands recessed until 10:30 this morning.

The House recessed from 1014 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Todd Smith: I'd like to welcome the members from the Ontario Good Roads Association. In particular, the chief administrative officer for the city of Belleville, Rick Kester, joins us today.

Mr. Paul Miller: I have some friends in the members' west gallery: Karl and Shirley Bryan, Frank and Mary Tousaw, and my wife, Carole Paikin-Miller.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I'm delighted to make sure that everybody knows today is CAA's lobby day here at

Queen's Park. I'd like to welcome those joining us here for question period: Sue Waywell, the board chair; Teresa Di Felice, the director of government and community relations; Elliott Silverstein, manager of government relations; Ghazal Momen, who is a former Queen's Park staffer and is part of the CAA team; and the rest of the CAA government and community relations team here today at Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Very quickly: It looks like we have a very large number of introductions today so let's keep to the point, get that done quickly and I'll cover everyone.

Mr. Michael Harris: I would like to welcome guests of page captain William Dixon, who's just walking down there right now: parents Christine and John; brothers, Luke and Graham; sisters Danielle and Claire; and, of course, grandmother Sylvia. Welcome to Queen's Park, guys.

Miss Monique Taylor: I would also like to welcome one of our page captain's, Helen Kottaras, family here. We have her parents, Angie and George Kottaras; brother, Steven Kottaras, who is a former page—welcome back to Queen's Park. And we have both sets of grandparents today: Helen and Sam Sutter and Catherine and Steve Kottaras. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Ted McMeekin: Today I'd like to welcome guests from the Ontario Lung Association here for their Queen's Park day. Joining us in the gallery today are Gemma Styling, Bob Wood, Lana Biro, George Habib, Peter Glazier, Kathy Downes, Chris Yaccato, Sherry Zarins, Tristan McIntosh, Andrea Stevens Lavigne, Shelley Prevost and Monica Kocsmaros. Joining us later will be Jeff Lee, Sandy Lee and Walter Gretzky. A reminder to all members of their reception tonight in room 230 at 5 o'clock. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mrs. Gila Martow: CAA South Central Ontario has their offices in my riding, and I want to welcome my constituent Elliott Silverstein and the rest of the team: Matthew Turack, division president, CAA insurance; Cindy Hillaby, vice-president, CAA South Central Ontario; Josef Raffai, managing director of marketing, CAA North and East Ontario; Amy Orfanakos, senior communication specialist, CAA North and East Ontario; and sitting in the members' gallery, Tracy Nickleford, Raymond Chan and Ethel Taylor. Everybody, welcome.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: From the Ontario Good Roads Association, I would like to welcome Tom Bateman, Chris Traini and Rayna Gillis.

From the Canadian Automobile Association today I would like to welcome back to Queen's Park Christine Allum; Josef Raffai and Danica Logan.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Some of the family of William Dixon have been introduced, but I wanted to do a special shout-out to Sylvia Dixon and Bill Dixon, who are the grandparents from Don Valley West and from the church that I belong to.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I'd like to welcome Leroy Workman and Linda Straus from my riding of Perth—Wellington.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Please join me in welcoming two members of the Waterloo Professional Fire Fighters Association joining us today in the members' gallery. They are in Toronto today for the OPFA conference: president Dean Good, and vice-president Brett Gibson. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Reza Moridi: Please join me in welcoming Greg Horton and Jeff Voisin from the Richmond Hill Professional Fire Fighters Association, as well as Paria Shahverdi, a painter and artist from my riding of Richmond Hill.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I would like to welcome to Queen's Park today a grade 5 class from Summit Heights elementary school, including my good friend Warren Richmond, the son of Mike and Kaydee Richmond.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I would also like to welcome the Ontario professional firefighters here to the Legislature: president Rob Hyndman, and vice-president Mark Train.

Also, from the Oshawa professional firefighters: president Steve Barkwell, vice-president Rod Thwaites, Brett Cooper, Cory Hesson and firefighters from across Ontario. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Michael Chan: We are pleased to welcome the Ontario Arts Council, distinguished artists and other members of Ontario's arts sector who are here today for Arts Day at Queen's Park. Welcome.

Mr. Lorne Coe: I would like to introduce to the Legislature Kerry and Barry Mount and Dave MacAskill from the Whitby Sunrise Rotary Club. Welcome.

Mr. John Vanthof: I'd like to introduce Don and Irene Smith. Irene is the vice-president of the 293 Branch, Larder Lake Legion, and Don is the sergeant-at-arms. Welcome.

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: From my riding of Barrie, I wish to welcome ShoShona Kish, who is here with the Ontario Arts Council, and my friend Bryan Lewis, who is here from OGRA.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Please join me in welcoming guests from St. Michael Catholic Secondary School, who will be joining us later on.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I'd like to welcome London West constituent Amy Bryson, who is here with the CAA.

I would also like to introduce friends from London: Jamelie Hassan, a Governor General Award-winning artist; Ron Benner, another artist; Marie-France Arismendi; and Manuel Arismendi.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: I'd like to welcome Sue Waywell from my riding of Kingston and the Islands, who's here with CAA, as well as Amy Orfanakos and Teresa Di Felice, also from CAA; as well as George Habib and Chris Yaccato from the Lung Association. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I, too, wish to welcome my friend Councillor Bryan Lewis of the town of Halton Hills, who is here for the Good Roads lobby day. Welcome to the Ontario Legislature.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'm going to do two introductions at the same time so that I can save time. First of all,

Richard Bishop and Peter Osterberg are here from the OPFFA. Welcome to them.

Also, from OGRA—the people who take care of all our roads—all the way from Timmins, my neighbour at the cottage, Kamiskotia Lake, lot 20-whatever we are, Luc Duval.

Mr. James J. Bradley: I'd like to welcome to the Legislature today Ryan Madill, president, and Mike Vail, vice-president, of the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association Local 485; and Dave Wood, chief of the fire service in the city of St. Catharines.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'd like to welcome Abbas Latif. He's volunteering in my office. Thank you very much, Abbas.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'd just like to welcome Todd Brunning and Dave Jarrett, Niagara Falls firefighters. And I'd like to welcome all the firefighters who are here on their lobby day. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mrs. Cristina Martins: It gives me great pleasure to rise here today to welcome my constituent from the riding of Davenport, who's sitting just behind us here: Laura Berthiaume. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'd like to introduce two of the best firefighters in Ontario, from St. Thomas: Warren Scott and Daryl Smith. Welcome, guys.

Hon. David Zimmer: I'd like to welcome, in the gallery, Jee-Yun Lee, who is the news anchor from CP24; her son Zander Kim; and her mother, Soon Year Lee.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I'd like to welcome the mayor of the Town of the Blue Mountains, Mr. John McKean, who is here with the Ontario Good Roads Association.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I'd like to introduce a few firefighters from Sudbury: Mark Muldoon, Kris Volpel and president Rob Hyndman. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: We have, from the Pickering Professional Firefighters Association, in the upper gallery, president Colin Arnott and secretary Neil Delory.

Also joining us will be Damien Walsh from the Toronto firefighters' association.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I'd like to acknowledge the professional firefighters' association from North Bay. We have Gord Mulcahey and Mike Gillies.

As well, we have a good friend of mine from my hometown of Corbeil, Rick Champagne, who is OGRA's past president.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I, too, would like to welcome firefighters from Windsor. I'd like to welcome Kris Katton and Wayne Currie. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Kathryn McGarry: I have two members from the Cambridge Professional Fire Fighters' Association: John Holman and Chris Davidson, in the members' east gallery.

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: I'd like to welcome, with the CAA today, my constituent Ethel Taylor.

Hon. Dipika Damerla: It's my pleasure to welcome, in the members' gallery, our friends from the Ontario Retirement Communities Association, who are at Queen's Park for their first-ever lobby day and reception. I ask everybody to please attend the reception. I would

also like to welcome ORCA board chair Sharon Henderson, CEO Laurie Johnston and vice-president Paul Fogolin, all of whom are here today.

1040

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: I would like to welcome Ann Bryan from Kingston and the Islands. She's with our firefighters.

Mr. Grant Crack: On behalf of my colleague the MPP for Durham, Mr. Anderson, I'd like to welcome guests of page Emma-Rose Hoog. Her mother, Sarah, is here, and her sister Lavinia. They're in the public gallery this morning. Welcome.

Mr. Arthur Potts: I would like to introduce my constituent Chris Yaccato, who is in the House today.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: Here today for the Ontario Arts Council day from my riding of Kitchener Centre, we have Andrew Bennett from the KW symphony and Shirley Madill with the KW art gallery. Welcome.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you for your co-operation. If you have not been introduced, please raise your hand. Welcome.

REPORT, FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICER

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that I have today laid upon the table a report from the Financial Accountability Officer.

ELIZABETH JOAN SMITH

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): A point of order, the government House leader.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, I believe you will find that we have unanimous consent to recognize the former member of provincial Parliament from London South, Ms. Elizabeth Joan Smith, with a representative from each caucus speaking for up to five minutes.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent to pay tribute. Do we agree? Agreed.

The member from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I am truly honoured to have the opportunity to pay tribute to former member Elizabeth Joan Smith, an extraordinarily smart and generous woman who was dedicated to public service. Since I knew I was doing the tribute today, I made sure that I wore my red tie for the Smith family this morning.

First off, I want to welcome the family—

Applause.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I want to first start by welcoming the family of Elizabeth Joan Smith to Queen's Park today. It has been a real pleasure reaching out to family and friends of former MPP Smith and to hear so many wonderful stories about her life and legacy.

Joan, as she was always known, was a dedicated volunteer, politician, wife, mother of seven and grandmother of 22 very proud grandchildren. Having had this occasion to look into all that she accomplished and contributed, I was simply amazed. This was a woman who kept up an

incredible pace throughout her life and truly gave her all to both her family and her community.

Growing up in southwestern Ontario, I personally recall Joan's time in office. She was well known, well liked and a famous hometown politician. Always on the move, her red running shoes were a local legend. I believe her first campaign slogan was "Run, Joan, Run!"

Joan graduated from the University of Toronto with a BA in philosophy and English. It was during her time at U of T that she met and married the love of her life, Don Smith, a civil engineering student. Together they would raise a family of seven wonderful children—five boys and two girls—which is a pretty incredible accomplishment in and of itself.

Don Smith is well known across the province and beyond as one of the founders of EllisDon construction, which is a great Ontario success story. With EllisDon, the Smith family built one of Canada's greatest companies, which continues to create jobs in London and throughout the country while building some of our most iconic infrastructure.

As Joan and Don grew the business and raised their children, she was also busy serving the community. She was a great community leader from a young age. She was head of the household campaign of the London United Way and the founding president of Madame Vanier Children's Services. During that time, she was also an active member with many other excellent organizations, including the London diocese Catholic charities board, Family and Children's Services of London and Middlesex County, and the London housing authority, just to name a few. These weren't once-a-week type of commitments. This was Joan's vocation.

As her children grew up, she had no intention of slowing down. She turned her passion for service into a pursuit of elected office. In 1976 she ran and won the seat of alderman with London city council for ward 2. She worked in that capacity until 1982, when she became controller on council.

In 1985, she made the decision to move to provincial politics. I understand that in her first campaign, her election signs had the big name "Joan Smith" and you could hardly see the Liberal Party name on the sign. London, of course, in those early 1980s was a bastion of conservatism, but Joan was so popular in her own right that she managed to unseat an incumbent minister who set a provincial record for campaign spending. During her time at Queen's Park from 1985 until 1990, she served as government whip and deputy House leader. She was a member of the Board of Internal Economy and was appointed the Solicitor General. She was the first woman to ever hold that title in Ontario.

When she left public office, she continued to work hard for causes she believed in and was a mentor to many who are now carrying on her legacy of service, including former PC cabinet minister Dianne Cunningham, who had the opportunity to talk to you about the legacy of Joan Smith.

Joan Smith and her family have been pillars of the community in London from the 1950s to this very day,

giving generously of their time and resources to support more worthy causes than I have time to mention here this morning. The benefits of Joan's drive, intelligence and tenacity are still felt by many institutions and organizations in London and area today.

Political life and public service are very demanding, and I want to thank Joan's family for sharing her and allowing us all to benefit from her energy and talents. She set out with strong values and a determination to do good in the world, and she accomplished incredible things. Her example has inspired and will continue to inspire many of us. It reminds me of why I'm here, and I know her legacy as a trailblazer and tireless advocate will one day inspire my daughter and all women across the province of Ontario.

Thank you again to the Smith family. Thank you for sharing Joan with all of us in the province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further tributes?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: It is an honour for me to rise today on behalf of the Ontario NDP caucus to pay tribute to former London South MPP Elizabeth Joan Smith.

In August 2013, about three weeks after I was elected, the London Free Press ran a story entitled "Unlikely City Puts Women in Power." The story noted that, "One of Canada's 10 largest cities, for the first time in its history, now counts more women than men as senior lawmakers." It went on to say: "In senior politics, especially at the provincial level, London takes a back seat to few in gender equality," sending "strong women to Queen's Park in senior roles for at least two generations...."

Speaker, before Deb Matthews, before Dianne Cunningham, before Marion Boyd, before Irene Mathysen, long before Teresa Armstrong and I, there was Joan Smith, the trail-blazing matriarch who paved the way for London women in provincial politics. For that, we are profoundly grateful.

I met Joan just once about a year or so ago at a youth award ceremony at the Boys and Girls Club, one of the many community organizations that has benefited enormously from the generosity and passion of Joan and her husband, Don. With a twinkle in her eye, she said, "So you're the Peggy Sattler I've been hearing about." We chatted a bit, and in that brief exchange, I experienced all the qualities that people remember about Joan. She was kind and curious, big-hearted and sharp-witted, down to earth and full of life.

Joan Smith was a woman ahead of her time and was always on the go. By the age of 21, she had graduated from the University of Toronto, married her lifelong partner, Don Smith, a force to be reckoned with in his own right, and delivered the first of her seven children. While caring for her growing family, her tireless work as a community activist first took form when she was appointed to the local synod and drove the process of reform within the Catholic Church. She went on to play key leadership roles with the Catholic Children's Aid Society, the London housing authority and the United Way.

In 1965, she helped found Madame Vanier Children's Services, a children's mental health agency that last year

celebrated its 50-year anniversary and which remains one of Joan's many crowning achievements.

Jim Smith, a friend of her son's, describes Joan as a mother to everyone in a house full of kids: practical, no nonsense and unperturbed by neighbourhood children running in and out of the door. He also recalls lively and animated policy discussions between Joan and Don, who although the best of friends, both had strong opinions, and were not afraid to disagree.

In 1976 Joan won her first seat on the London city council, where she served until making the jump to provincial politics in 1985 as a Liberal Party candidate. Throughout the election, Joan could be seen everywhere in the riding of London South wearing her signature red running shoes, knocking on doors and energetically running from event to event.

1050

She defeated the Conservative incumbent in a Tory stronghold and was soon afterwards named party whip for the Liberals, later serving as the first woman Solicitor General in Ontario's history.

Joan was always a champion of social justice, someone who fought for the underdog and was outspoken in defence of what was right. Her political opponent, David Winner, who ran for the NDP against Joan in the 1985, 1987 and 1990 provincial elections, remembers her as a "kindred spirit" because of her commitment to social causes. Joan must have felt the same way about Winner. After his second loss to Joan in 1987, she asked him to chair the London and Middlesex Housing Corp., a position that was then a provincial appointment, because she saw him as an ally in his advocacy for social housing.

She was defeated by Winner in 1990, but immediately embraced a new role on the board of King's University College. Today, her presence can be felt everywhere on the King's campus; for example, in the Joan Smith Student Leadership Suite in the Student Life Centre or in the student scholarship she established. But her biggest legacy, according to King's University College principal David Sylvester, was in the culture she created as a passionate advocate for student voice and student leadership in governance.

Current King's programs on women in politics and women's leadership are a direct result of the ethos she established about the importance of engaging young women in civic and political life. Her legacy will live on in the future generations of London women who will be coming to Queen's Park to represent London ridings.

Most of all, of course, Joan's legacy lives in her family: her seven children, who are here with us today, her 22 grandchildren and her seven great-grandchildren. Politics is not easy on families, and we thank you for sharing Joan with us. In the end, I do not doubt that Joan's deepest wish was achieved, which was to be a good role model for her family. She made a positive difference in the world, and for that we are profoundly grateful.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further tribute?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I am deeply honoured to have the opportunity to speak today, and I confess more than a little bit emotional. I'm delighted so many members of that large and exuberant and boisterous Smith family are here. I knew they had arrived, Speaker, because I could hear them from this chamber.

I just want to welcome them by name: Donnie, Jacqui and Domonique are here; Mike and Diane; Geoff's son Rory; Lynne Cram and Tom; Rob, Andrew, Nicky and Darren Elligsen; little Amie Joan, representing the great-grandchildren, is here; Bob and Terry Smith; Gord Smith and Erin Wendl; Cathy Martin, Sara and Xavier Debane; and David and Jennifer Smith and Shannon are here. Eleven other grandchildren, her son Geoff, six other great-grandchildren, with two more on the way, are all here in spirit, Speaker. In fact, I think the Smith family is putting that Speaker's gallery to the test. How many people can it hold? I think we're testing it today.

I want to say welcome to each and every member of the Smith family. I know that today is a bittersweet day—a day to be so proud and to celebrate Joan's accomplishments, but also a day to feel the loss. I know this was a place that Joan loved, and this place holds many happy memories for her.

I know at a time like this we can talk about the accomplishments of the person we are honouring, and that is a long list, including bringing in Sunday shopping, bringing in and implementing full funding for Catholic schools, of course Madame Vanier—many, many, many accomplishments. But in the short time allotted to me, I want to talk about her spirit. I want to talk about the character of Joan Smith because that is what made her exceptionally special.

I was very lucky to have known Joan and her family for a very long time. In fact, Speaker, the Matthews family and the Smith family were rivals in business, rivals in politics, but in fact we were great, great friends—in fact, so close that I had to take the unprecedented step, I believe, of getting a letter from the Integrity Commissioner saying that I was not, in fact, related to the Smith family, because that was the legend around here, Speaker.

People who are lucky enough to have known Joan Smith well are different people because they knew Joan Smith. She shaped us all and sometimes in a very profound way. We've heard Joan was brilliant. She was a brilliant, brilliant person. Not only was she smart; she drove everyone around her to stretch their critical thinking skills. As we've heard, she was always ready for a debate, most especially with her husband, Don. In fact, at the funeral, we heard stories about friends of the Smith kids coming over to the house at 1400 Corley Drive and being afraid that Joan and Don were going to come to blows because of the debate they were having. The Smith family, of course, knew that was just normal. They'd read the paper and have a debate. Geoff once said Joan wouldn't let you off the hook. If you couldn't defend your opinion, you were in for a challenge from Joan, and the more she respected you, the more she would challenge you.

Joan had a mind of her own—a very independent woman. She stood her ground. I remember the 1992 Liberal leadership convention, Speaker. Some here were there. Don Smith was a strong and firm supporter of Murray Elston. Joan Smith, not surprisingly, was a firm and strong supporter of Lyn McLeod. I remember the voting went on for hours and hours and came down to two candidates, Murray Elston with Don Smith, Lyn McLeod with Joan Smith. The final result, Speaker, we know: Lyn McLeod won by nine votes. I want to say that Don was a good loser, but he wasn't, and I am told that the drive back to London was a very quiet drive home.

You know, the thing that I loved most about Joan were her values. As her daughter Lynne said, Joan was a rebel from the beginning, always standing up for the underdog. She had an unfailing moral compass. Whether it was a personal issue or a political issue, Joan knew what was right and she knew what was wrong. She knew whose side she was on, what was fair and what wasn't. Sometimes she had to think it through and apply that remarkable intellect to the moral dilemma at hand, but in the end Joan always landed in the right place, and that was where she would stand.

Joan was always someone I could go to to help me land in that right place, and while I will no longer be able to sit down and talk things over with her, I know that Joan will continue to help me get to that right place because she taught me how to do it.

We've heard how hard Joan Smith worked. She worked as hard as anyone I have ever known, and you've heard reference to those legendary red running shoes. In the months leading up to the campaign—her first campaign—I remember so clearly going out and knocking on doors. She would go out several days a week for several hours. She would get a team of people around her, and if you thought you were going for a leisurely stroll, forget it. Joan really made sure everyone with her worked as hard as she did. We worked hard, but we always had fun and had lots of laughs along with that.

I know the word “mentor” is overused, but Joan was certainly and in every way my mentor. She was one of my very first supporters when I decided to take that leap into politics. She was with me every step of the way. I was not the only person entering political life who benefited from Joan's advice. She was a fierce supporter and encouraged many women to enter politics. Her advice was always direct. She did not mince words. She did not beat around the bush. She told you straight up what you needed to do to be successful.

Speaker, all of us know that there are several degrees of support when it comes to running for office. Some people offer kind words and moral support, and that's great. Some people write a cheque, and that is also appreciated. Some offer up their time, and some people throw themselves into the campaign, and that is priceless. I can tell you, Speaker, Joan was priceless. From my nomination fight in 2003 to my most recent campaign, Joan was with me actively. She made lists. She cajoled her friends to do what was necessary to get me elected.

She was so good, in fact, that one of my opponents for the nomination complained that I had an unfair advantage: I had a team of stay-at-home little old ladies. Well, yes, I did. And Joan was captain of that team. And I won.

1100

But, Speaker, we all won because we had Joan in our lives. We won because we learned from her how to be the very best we can be; to not be content to just talk about problems but to work to solve them; to be a champion for a fairer, better society; to take care of those who are facing the greatest challenges; to speak for those whose voices are not heard; and to be a friend in good times and in bad. Joan Smith was a great woman. The world is better because of her.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): They say that confession is good for the soul. As Speaker, I made a mistake: my feeble attempt at humour. When I asked if there was anyone else who didn't get introduced to raise your hand, I forgot to introduce my guests who are here today for the tribute.

Would the members please join me in welcoming the family of the late Elizabeth Joan Smith, MPP for London South during the 33rd and 34th Parliaments, who are seated in the gallery: her son Don Smith and his wife, Jacqui; her son Mike Smith and his wife Diane; her son Geoff Smith; her daughter Lynne Cram and her partner, Tom; her son Bob Smith and his wife, Terry; her daughter Cathy Martin; her son David Smith and his wife Jennifer; and all of their grandchildren. Welcome, and thank you for being here for this wonderful tribute.

From the former parliamentarians, a special guest: David Warner, the Speaker in the 35th Parliament. David, thank you for attending as well.

I thank all members for their very kind and heartfelt comments. To the family, thank you for the gift of Joan. We will be making sure the family receives a copy of Hansard and a DVD for each of you to share these wonderful tributes to your loved one. Thank you for the gift of Joan.

ORAL QUESTIONS

FUNDRAISING

Mr. Steve Clark: My question is for the Premier. In 2014, the Ontario Liberal Party paid William Trudell, the law firm representing Pat Sorbara, just a little over \$4,000. In 2015, the Liberals paid William Trudell over \$147,000. I can only imagine what the 2016 bill will be, given the litany of new Liberal scandals.

Mr. Speaker, will the Premier guarantee that no taxpayers' money will be used to pay the lawyers of Liberals charged in the Sudbury bribery scandal?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Attorney General.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: As you know, this matter is before the courts. The individuals who have been charged in this matter have retained counsel. Of course, those counsels'

retainers will be paid by the people responsible. The government, of course, will not be paying for any of those legal dues. That's not the norm, and that won't be happening in this instance.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Steve Clark: Again, I'll try to get the Premier on the record.

The Premier is supposed to be in Sudbury tonight. The Sudbury Red Tent Dinner was scheduled to take place tonight at the Radisson Hotel: \$500 a ticket, or \$5,000 a table. The Premier, the Ministers of Northern Development and Mines, Municipal Affairs and Community Safety—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm quite prepared to pick up where I left off yesterday—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): And while I'm speaking, I wouldn't want anyone interjecting.

To repeat myself now that I have quiet, I'm quite prepared to the pick up where I left off yesterday.

Mr. Steve Clark: The Premier and all those ministers are all scheduled to attend, alongside the member for Sudbury, this high-priced Liberal fundraiser. But what is the money going towards, Speaker? Is tonight's Liberal fundraiser being used to fund the legal defences of those accused in the Sudbury by-election scandal?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I guess my first statement didn't quite sink in. I will move to warnings on one side if I have to.

Attorney General.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaking of fundraisers, I think the member opposite should speak to his seatmate next to him and ask him how his "final funders" are going on. They will be taking place tomorrow for \$500, speaking of high-priced fundraising events.

Speaker, as we know, all parties continue to fundraise under the rules that exist today. I know that the party opposite, the Conservatives, have been doing big fundraisers. They did one in Vaughan, raising millions of dollars, selling tables for thousands and thousands of dollars.

At the same time, the opposition party continues to stall the work of the committee on Bill 2 and continues to drag on that work by filibustering the committee, because they like the status quo, Speaker. They want to make sure that they continue to operate in the existing legal framework as opposed to the changes that we want to bring to make sure that Ontario becomes a leader when it comes to how parties are financed, and making sure that we have more transparency and accountability and we put an end to corporate and union donations.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. As this has revealed itself, I'm going to now try to rein this in a little bit and ask all sides to make reference to government policy and concerns about the specifics of what government is doing. We'll stay away from the other side of this—which is very hard to do; and I'm

being honest about this. I let it go because I wanted to see if there was a relationship to government policy.

I'm going to ask the member to continue with his questions, but do recommend to him to see if he can tie that in tighter to government policy, please.

Mr. Steve Clark: Speaker, back to the Premier: A link to the invitation to the fundraiser remains on the Liberal website, and a link to the form to purchase a table remains active. But the event is conspicuously absent from the list of fundraising events on the website. Is this event cancelled or are the Liberals now hiding this event?

Mr. Speaker, the people of Sudbury have been lied to enough. What is happening with this Sudbury fundraiser tonight?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, it's not a policy question, but the reason the member is not seeing that fundraiser on the website is because it has been rescheduled. Thank you very much for noticing. Clearly, he's spending a lot of time just looking at fundraisers.

I'm sure he's going to the "final funder" tomorrow that the member from North Bay is doing, because he's asking people to "please dig deep and donate to your maximum."

So here you go: The parties opposite continue to fundraise, asking people to dig deep, while they're also stalling the work of the committee which is working on Bill 2, which will ensure that we put an end to corporate and union donations, which is going to put strict caps on fundraising and would also put rules in place that will prohibit MPPs from attending fundraising events. I can tell you, Speaker, the Conservatives and their leader do not want those changes. They love the status quo. That's why they don't want Bill 2 to pass, either.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Steve Clark: My question is for the Premier. The Minister of Energy has been accused by a federal prosecutor of asking for an alleged bribe to run for the Liberal Party.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Beaches–East York and the member from St. Catharines, the chief government whip, will come to order.

I'm getting desperately close, because of certain individuals, to move into yesterday's procedure, which is to go to warnings.

Finish your question, please.

Mr. Steve Clark: The ethical, moral and trust issues are compromised. The integrity of this minister has been called into question. He must step down.

Will the Premier accept the minister's resignation today?

1110

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I categorically reject the premise of the question, and no, I will not.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Steve Clark: Yesterday the Minister of Energy said this: "If anyone's ever had to explain to a nine-year-

old why you're not a bad man, it's not an easy conversation."

Nobody in the opposition has ever accused the Minister of Energy of being a bad man. In fact, we have encouraged the minister to show that he's an honourable man and to do the right thing.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Chief government whip, second time.

Hon. Charles Sousa: You got kids, pal?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Finance.

Hon. David Zimmer: Bring family into it—shame on you.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation.

Please complete your question.

Mr. Steve Clark: A few crocodile tears to elicit sympathy doesn't change that fact, and regardless—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

The Minister of Labour will withdraw.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Withdraw, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We're moving to warnings for everyone.

Wrap-up sentence, please.

Mr. Steve Clark: Regardless, the minister has been accused of seeking a bribe. The honourable thing for him to do is step aside.

Will the Premier walk over to the minister's desk—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order, please. Be seated, please.

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I have full confidence in the integrity of the Minister of Energy, absolutely full confidence.

I have to say that I cannot express the depth of my disappointment at a member of this House expressing or mocking—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. The member from Ancaster will withdraw.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Withdraw, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): If I hear it again, we're going to get into naming. Either side knows better.

Finish your answer.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you. A member of this Legislature mocking another member, a man who was defending his family—I cannot express the depth of my disappointment.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please.

Final supplementary.

Mr. Steve Clark: Back to the Premier. A minister of the crown has been accused of seeking a bribe from the Premier's deputy chief of staff. The opposition is not

asking the trial to take place in the Legislature. We want it to play out in a court of law.

But the people of Ontario deserve answers, and only the Premier can provide those answers. She knows she can invoke her right and privilege to avoid testifying in the trial, but I believe she must tell the truth to Ontarians.

Will the Premier waive her right to avoid taking the stand and testify in the trial of Patricia Sorbara?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: There is a legal process that is taking place outside of this House, and that is where it should take place. We are doing the work of the people of Ontario in this House, and the Minister of Energy is doing that with integrity.

We all know, as members of this Legislature, how challenging it is to be in the public eye and for our families to be in the public eye. I think it behooves every single one of us to respect that and to respect the honour of members who are doing just that, who are protecting their families and are serving with integrity the people of Ontario.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. A federal prosecutor said that the Minister of Energy asked for some special benefits so he would run for the Liberal Party. It's a serious accusation, Speaker, coming from a serious source. It's not the sort of thing to shrug off.

Has the Premier talked to her minister face to face since this allegation was made by a federal prosecutor?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I refer to my earlier answer. This is a process that is happening outside of this House. I have full confidence in the integrity of the Minister of Energy. We are here doing the work of the people of Ontario, and the Minister of Energy is doing that to the best of his ability and with complete integrity.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: People want to have hope about good government, that political leaders can help to create opportunity for them and their kids. Instead, they see a government whose ethical standards for being in cabinet are simply that they haven't been charged with a crime. I think people deserve better, Speaker.

Will the Premier ask her minister to resign from cabinet until the air is cleared one way or the other?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Attorney General.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, these lines of questioning are very disturbing. The tone and the innuendo is extremely disheartening.

All of us in this House work to the best of our capability. We work hard. We balance our personal lives so that we can serve our communities. The Minister of Energy is no different. He is an honourable man. He's a family man. He's a community man. He is somebody who works in his community day in and out, travelling between Toronto, here at Queen's Park, and his community in Sudbury.

Speaker, to draw his name into something that has nothing to do with him, that has nothing to do with his

responsibilities as the Minister of Energy, when there are no charges against him is absolutely unfair and inappropriate.

I urge the members again: Let's get back to focusing on issues that are important to the people of Ontario. Let's not do mudslinging. We are better than that.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please. Thank you.

Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, asking the minister to resign while these allegations are hanging over the Liberal cabinet isn't about trying this case in the Legislature, as the Premier and her minister like to claim. It's about demonstrating integrity, demonstrating respect for this institution and demonstrating respect for the people of Ontario.

When Greg Sorbara was named in an RCMP warrant, he stepped aside until the matter was resolved. It's about showing responsibility for his office.

The Premier needs to explain why she thinks it's okay that her Minister of Energy is sitting in cabinet while there are allegations that he asked for some benefit in order to resign as a member of Parliament and run for the Liberal Party of Ontario. Can she explain how that helps people trust her government?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, what is disappointing is the lack of respect and the lack of integrity that the opposition parties continue to show for the members in this House and for the procedure of this House.

Nobody is new in this House. Everybody knows what the rules are. You have spoken about those rules, Speaker. It is a clearly established rule in our Westminster model of democracy—not only in this House, but in all Commonwealth Houses—that when a matter is before the courts, we do not discuss them in the House. We let an independent court, led by an independent judge, deal with those matters.

The Minister of Energy is not charged with any offence whatsoever. He is not being investigated. The matter deals with two individuals who are in the process. Let's respect the process. Let's respect the integrity of the members of the House. There's a reason that we refer to each other as honourable members. I ask the members opposite to demonstrate their honour in this case as well.

1120

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): New question. The leader of the third party.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This member needs to know that neither were any of the other examples that we've been raising in this House, Speaker. None of those people were actually charged either. They did the right thing by stepping aside, however.

ENERGY POLICIES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is for the Premier. On the weekend, the Premier stood in front of a

room of Liberal Party faithful and said that she has made a mistake by letting hydro bills get out of control. Maybe she was referring to the privatization of Hydro One or the privatization of green energy. Maybe it was signing the cabinet decision which led to paying \$1.1 billion to cancel the two gas plants. Maybe it was continuing the PC privatization of electricity generation in this province, which has been going on now for over 20 years.

So what was the mistake, and what is the Premier going to do to fix it?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, this weekend I talked about the reality that we're building an inclusive economy, and I talked about the initiatives that we have put in place in order to do that. I also talked about the reality that there is a burden on people because the electricity system in this province was a mess. It had to be cleaned up. There had to be investments, and we have made those investments, and we have made those changes. We also recognize that there's a burden that has been placed on people across the province, and we have been working to correct that, but we also know that there's more that has to be done. It is why we have taken the debt retirement charge off of bills. It is why we've created the Ontario Electricity Support Program. It is why, as of January 1, the provincial portion of the HST will come off people's bills. Those changes are all in place.

What I said on the weekend was that we need to do more, and that's exactly what—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, if the Premier is going to stand here and defend the status quo, it makes her apology ring awful hollow, doesn't it?

Jane, a mom in Kingston, had to choose between groceries or her hydro bill. She bought groceries, and Kingston Hydro cut off her power.

Peter and Mel also live in Kingston. Even after receiving help from the Low-Income Energy Assistance Program, they were cut off by Hydro One. Now their house is flooded, and they're running a gas generator so that they can run the fridge for a couple of hours a day.

I ask the Premier: How is this an inclusive Ontario, when families can't survive? People don't need an apology. They need to be able to pay their bills. Will the Premier take the first step and stop any further sell-off of Hydro One?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, the solution that the leader of the third party puts forward will not solve the problem.

In fact, what we have acknowledged, and I have said repeatedly and said again on the weekend, is that we need to do more. It is unacceptable to me that people would have to make those kinds of choices, which is exactly why we've been taking action. The premise of the ques-

tion of the third leader, that somehow the status quo is acceptable—what we have done, Mr. Speaker, is change the system, clean up the system—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Just a reminder: We're at warnings.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —clean up the mess left by previous governments—not just the Conservatives, but the NDP as well. In doing so, there have been costs associated with that cleanup.

We recognize that there is still more we need to do to take costs off people's bills. So the status quo is not acceptable. That was exactly what I was talking about on the weekend.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, more privatization in the electricity system will absolutely make things much, much worse, and it's unbelievable that this Premier does not accept that fact.

In 2013, this Premier apologized for the cancellation of the gas plants, but instead of changing, instead of fixing the underlying problem—the fact that it was costing Ontarians more and more just to turn on the lights—the Premier made an apology and then went right back to business as usual. That is not the kind of leadership that people expected, nor is it what they deserve. People don't need the Premier to admit a mistake and then ignore the problem. They need the problem to be fixed, and they need the behaviour to change.

Will this Premier start fixing her mistakes and stop the privatization of Hydro One and start getting bills under control?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, again, I will say to the leader of the third party, that is exactly what I said on the weekend. I said that there are some things that we have done to take costs off the electricity bills of people in the province, whether it's removal of the debt retirement charge, putting in place the Ontario Energy Support Program, or the changes that will come into place as of January 1 in terms of the provincial portion of the HST. Those are all things that we have done, recognizing that there has been a cost associated with cleaning up the mess in the electricity system that was left to us. We recognize that.

Then I said, Mr. Speaker, that there's more that we need to do. I've committed to that, we have committed to that, and we will be making more changes going forward.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Victor Fedeli: My question is for the Minister of Finance. Today, the Financial Accountability Officer confirmed what we've said all along: The government's flawed cap-and-trade plan is about raising revenues, not cutting emissions. The FAO says that cash raised from cap-and-trade would "reduce the deficit ... in that year and increase the deficit ... in future years." He's already told us they're using one-time money from asset sales

and contingency funds to artificially balance the budget in an election year, and now he has confirmed that the Liberal government is using cap-and-trade as yet another cash grab to pay for their years of waste, mismanagement and scandals.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister come clean and admit he's using the cap-and-trade funds to artificially balance the budget in an election year?

Hon. Charles Sousa: I appreciate the work by the FAO yet again illustrating what it is that's going forward, recognizing also, as outlined in our Climate Change Mitigation and Low-carbon Economy Act, that every dollar that is raised is allocated specifically to the use of reducing our emissions. We made that very clear. It is being very determined and disciplined in the way we proceed. Furthermore, it is also limited to the amount that is received. Revenues that come in are offset by the investments we make and the expenses we make for cap-and-trade projects. That will always be the case.

I'm going to recognize the tremendous work of our minister of climate change, who has taken leadership in initiating this, putting Ontario at the forefront of embracing a low-carbon economy, which, in fact, will increase our overall economic growth and enable all Ontarians to better benefit not only from lower emissions but also an improved economy.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Back to the minister: Speaker, I ask the minister to pick up this book. Go to any page. The FAO has outlined all of the scenarios that they're going to use to artificially balance the budget in an election year. Pick a page. Page 1: "reduce the deficit" now "and increase the deficit ... in future years." Page 5: "resulting in the cap-and-trade ... reducing deficits." Page 16: "The result would be a reduction in the deficit."

Speaker, I ask the minister: Pick a page and then tell us, will he come clean and report to this Legislature and admit that he's using cap-and-trade funds to artificially balance the budget?

Hon. Charles Sousa: So, page 9: The "report does not: forecast cap-and-trade revenues, expenses or cash flows," nor does it "analyze potential economic" benefits, Mr. Speaker. The FAO recognizes that it's dependent upon our government to take the stands, to make the appropriate decisions, to balance the books, ensure that we increase our economic growth and protect our environment for future years. We're doing our job over here, recognizing that it's of net benefit to Ontarians going forward. We'll continue to do so.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Premier. On Monday, a federal prosecutor said that the Minister of Energy, the former MP for Sudbury, "sought certain benefits, offers or job or employment as part of his conditions for him to run as MPP" in that election.

Premier, the minister says he doesn't think what he did was a bribe, so my question is this: What did he ask for

and who did he ask? Did he ask you, did he ask Sorbara or did he ask Mr. Lougheed?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Attorney General.

1130

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: First of all, I thank the member. I welcome back the member opposite. It's good to have him back. It's good to deal with him on a regular basis as the NDP House leader.

I think the member knows quite well—he has been in the House for a long time—that when a matter is before the courts, it's highly inappropriate to discuss those matters in this House. That is to be dealt with within the courts. We very much respect the sub judice rule, and I would strongly encourage the member opposite that he should do the same. Let's let an independent court, our judiciary, make that determination in terms of the issues, the evidence and the allegations in this matter. We will respect that process, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Premier, people know across this province that they're paying too much for their hydro bills, so much so that last weekend, you finally admitted that what you've done with the hydro system was wrong and that it's costing people more money.

Here you have a minister that's under fire for this scandal. How can he do the job of making sure that he wrestles down the price of hydro for consumers and businesses in this province if he's constantly under the cloud of this particular scandal?

I ask you, will you do the right thing and will you ask him to step down, not only because it's the right thing to do, but because we need a minister who's actually going to try to do something about hydro prices?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: The Minister of Energy is very focused on his job as the minister responsible. He is working hard, along with the Minister of Infrastructure in his role, on cleaning up the mess that the NDP and the PCs left our energy sector in, and making sure that we have a green, reliable and secure energy system, to make sure we no longer have brownouts or blackouts, to make sure that we have no more smog days in the province of Ontario so that our kids can breathe easily and inhale fresh air, and so that the asthma rates are down in our province—not to mention, Speaker, that this Minister of Energy is working hard to bring the cost of electricity down. That is why he has permanently eliminated the 8% HST off our electricity bills. That will come into place on January 1. That is why we have got a program like the Ontario Electricity Support Program, to ensure that people who are vulnerable, who are low-income, have an extra break on their electricity bills.

POVERTY REDUCTION

Mr. Ted McMeekin: My question is to the Minister of Community and Social Services.

Yesterday, I was pleased to join the minister in Hamilton as our province kicked off public consultations for a Basic Income Pilot. Throughout the evening, we heard

valuable and insightful feedback from people who joined us from across the Hamilton region.

Though many—about 120 people—were able to join us for the consultation, many others were unable to attend. Some have asked me how they can follow the discussion at home or provide feedback on basic income.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister: Can the minister please outline how Ontarians who were unable to attend the session in Hamilton—and perhaps elsewhere, going forward—can participate in the discussion and provide their input on basic income moving forward?

Hon. Helena Jaczek: Thank you to the member for the question and for continuing to be a tireless advocate for the most vulnerable in Ontario.

As part of our government's commitment to transparency and accountability, we're making all information received at the consultations available on our website. You will be able to see a wrap-up of all the feedback from each consultation session online the day following the consultation.

For those keen to participate in their own communities, we're hosting several additional consultations across the province. A full list of available sessions can also be found online.

For those who have constituents wishing to provide their input from home, they can share their feedback via email or go online to complete the survey.

I encourage all members to share this information with their constituents, as it's important that we hear as many views as possible, to ensure that we get this right.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Ted McMeekin: Mr. Speaker, my supplemental has to do with poverty reduction.

Minister, I'm proud that our province is taking the lead in testing a basic income in Ontario as part of our government's income security efforts. Basic income is a different approach to financial assistance that would guarantee a minimum income level to eligible individuals in the province.

I know there is a great deal of interest around the world in the idea of a basic or guaranteed annual income, but there seems to be no agreed-upon approach that our government can look to as an example. This is why it is so important that we are holding public consultations.

Mr. Speaker, through you, will the minister tell us more about this innovative pilot project and how it's being developed with reference to Ontario's unique realities?

Hon. Helena Jaczek: Minister responsible for the Poverty Reduction Strategy.

Hon. Chris Ballard: Again, thank you to the member from Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Westdale for his great question and his continued leadership to make all Ontarians' lives better.

The pilot will test whether a basic income could deliver income security support more efficiently and improve health, employment and housing for Ontarians. I'd like to thank the Honourable Hugh Segal for his work on the discussion paper. We'll be using his paper as a

foundation during our broader engagement across the province.

Our engagement work will also include discussions with indigenous partners to ensure that our approach reflects the advice and unique perspectives of our First Nations, urban indigenous, Métis and Inuit partners.

We're always looking for innovative, evidence-based solutions that can help us reduce poverty and improve public services to make them simpler, more efficient and more effective for the people who need them the most.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: My question is for the Minister of the Environment. Yesterday, we heard concerns from the Environmental Commissioner that there are pitfalls associated with the Liberal cap-and-trade scheme. We know there will be a significant flow of Ontario dollars to California. We have seen independent reports that indicate as much as \$30 million by 2020 and \$3 billion by 2030.

Then, just this morning, the FAO reported that there is uncertainty surrounding the Liberals' cap-and-trade scheme: for example, the impact of a fluctuating exchange rate, meaning that even more money could be sent to California to subsidize emission reductions there and not here in Ontario.

How will the minister ensure that hard-earned Ontario dollars flowing to California will reduce emissions actually right here in Ontario?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I appreciate the question from the member opposite. Our action plan, which I think many folks are now familiar with—it has been out since the spring—proposes an \$8-billion investment that will deliver 9.8 megatonnes of GHG reductions based on programs that are tried and true around the world. This program will put \$8,000 to \$14,000 in the pockets of everyone buying a low-carbon electric vehicle. That's an unprecedented investment. This program will put thousands of dollars in the pockets of working families, not just to get rid of the polluting furnaces in their homes but to cut their energy and heating costs to make life more affordable.

This will make major investments in 158 major emitting sites like Nova Corp. in Sarnia, which is already putting a quarter of a billion dollars into reinvesting into that.

Mr. Speaker, their plan has no money. They would leave Ontarians stranded with high energy bills and no way to manage the transition to a low-carbon—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Back to the minister. We have heard concerns from independent officers of the House surrounding the Liberal cap-and-trade scheme this week. Speaker, independent officers, Queen's Park media, the loyal opposition, the third party and a whole host of stakeholders are uncomfortable with this government's lack of details associated with their cap-and-trade scheme. The only thing we can be certain of is that life is

going to become more expensive January 1, when the prices at fuel pumps go up and home heating goes up.

Given this government's track record and glaring lack of program details, how can we trust them? How will this minister ensure that their dependence on California allowances will not slow down Ontario's transition to a low-carbon economy?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: We'll have our first auction in March, and we're anticipating that will be very, very successful.

It's interesting; I want to thank the member very sincerely that she is concerned about the cost of living, because her leader, the member from Simcoe North, is proposing a revenue-neutral carbon tax, which to achieve the same reductions we're achieving with \$16, \$17 and \$18, would have to cost Ontarians between \$110 and \$150 a tonne. That would not see gasoline go up a couple of cents. That would see gasoline spike by dollars. That would see capital outflow in a way that you wouldn't even begin to imagine.

1140

So if the member opposite has concerns about the price, she should be a supporter about cap-and-trade, like 60% of the world economy, and nations representing 60% of the world's economy who have chosen cap-and-trade over their system—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.
New question.

MERCURY POISONING

M^{me} France G  linas: Ma question est pour la premi  re ministre.

Clay Lake and the Wabigoon River, where the good people of Grassy Narrows live, have the most mercury-contaminated fish in the province, and it's the Liberal government's own data that proves that. The mercury contamination is 15 times greater than what is safe to eat, and 40 times what's allowable if you're a woman of childbearing age or a child.

For 45 long years, this government has known about the mercury contamination, and yet for 45 long years, they have stood by and done nothing.

My question is simple: Has the Premier even bothered to find out if the Dryden mill site is still the source of mercury in the Wabigoon River? A yes-or-no answer would be good.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of the Environment and Climate Change.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, we have been actively doing testing with our scientists, throughout the fall, of the fish, as we committed to doing. We're also funding—that's about a \$300,000 investment; we have also put another additional \$300,000 in the hands of Chief Fobister and the First Nation, to continue to do their own studies.

We have completed very extensive tests all across the site, with supervision by the First Nations, and found there are no barrels buried and there is no source.

We do know, and it has been reported, that the conditions in the river right now lend themselves to higher mercury levels. We also are recognizing in the reports that have just come out recently that a lot of the mercury that's coming is long-distance-transported. It's methyl-mercury from Ohio and from China.

We have a much more complex situation than we imagined, and we are investing heavily to remediate it.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M^{me} France G  linas: Speaker, what the good people of Grassy Narrows want is what all of us would want if we were in that situation. We want the water to be cleaned up. We don't want any more study that tells us what we already know: that the bottom of the lake and the bottom of the river are full of mercury, and it needs to be cleaned up.

The government's own data proved that it is an unsafe level of mercury in the walleye in the river. That's the food source that the good people of Grassy Narrows rely on. Clearly, the Liberals' natural remediation, but what everybody calls the do-nothing approach, has failed us. It has failed their environment. It has failed the good people. It has failed the fish.

Premier, will you commit to action? Will you commit to cleaning up the Grassy Narrows river? Water is life.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, we're doing exactly what the chief and the First Nations wanted and asked for, and we are fully funding it to the extent they asked for.

Dr. Rudd, who did the initial report, in chapter 7, gave us two pages of exact measures and research that had to be done to determine where it was located and what the most appropriate remediation was. That is exactly the work we are doing.

The Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation and I meet every month in a political committee, with the chief overseeing that. The First Nation is in the lead, and we are doing that. In the same way—you would agree, I think—in Gogama, where you were satisfied, you told me yesterday, with the cleanup by CN, we worked together to do that.

We will hold the Grassy Narrows people no less important than the people of Gogama. I will promise that we will do the same thing there and get the cleanup to the satisfaction of the chief and the health of the people of Grassy Narrows.

MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT

Ms. Daiene Vernile: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Ontario's 444 municipalities play a very important role in our communities and our day-to-day lives. They provide services such as local transit, roads, library services, clean water, waste disposal, and parks and playgrounds.

While municipalities are best positioned to make local decisions, the province provides the legislative framework so that local governments can carry out their roles effectively.

The minister recently introduced legislation which would, if passed, update the Municipal Act, the City of Toronto Act and the Municipal Conflict of Interest Act. These proposed changes would help make local governments more flexible, open and responsive to the needs of their constituents.

Could the minister please outline for the House some of the changes that are proposed in this new bill?

Hon. Bill Mauro: I want to thank the member for the question. As she has mentioned, I was pleased to introduce Bill 68 this week into the House. It does represent a broad base of amendments in a package on three different pieces of legislation: the City of Toronto Act and the Municipal Act, which are mandatory reviews, but, as well, the Conflict of Interest Act. It's the first time that that particular piece of legislation has been looked at since, I think, about 1983. We're happy to be doing that work.

I want to, in the short time I have here this morning, thank everybody who has provided input, beginning under my predecessor Ted McMeekin, on a broad base of consultation that went forward to inform the work in Bill 68 that we introduced this week. I want to thank AMO. I want to thank the city of Toronto. I want to thank the municipalities and all of the municipal associations like NOMA, like FONOM, like OGRA and like ROMA. All of them have been instructive in informing the work that we've brought forward in Bill 68.

I look forward to second reading where we'll have an opportunity to debate the package with the members of the Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: I'd like to thank the minister for his extensive work on this file.

Currently, under the Municipal Act, municipalities can put in place their own leave policies, including parental and pregnancy leave. But if a municipality doesn't have a policy, a councillor has to go before council to ask permission to take a parental leave of more than 12 weeks. Recently, with the support of my local council in Kitchener, I introduced a private member's bill that would provide 20 weeks of maternity and parental leave.

Many women who are interested in public service will often choose local politics because it seems more family-friendly. There isn't the travel MPPs and MPs face, but how family-friendly is it if you could be fired after three months because you had or adopted a baby? We know it's very important to have women at the decision-making table, but in order to get to the table, there need to be accommodations to reflect life's realities, such as motherhood.

Could the minister please tell us how Bill 68 would address the issue of parental leave?

Hon. Bill Mauro: This is a real opportunity for me to thank the member from Kitchener Centre, Daiene Vernile, for her incredible work on what I see as one of the centrepieces of this particular piece of legislation. She has identified in a very clear way for us—and we were happy to take her private member's bill and incorporate it

into Bill 68—something that makes you stop and wonder why it hasn't happened before. Again, I'm going to thank her very much for her work. I know she was inspired by a local female councillor in her riding.

Any time that we can identify what I would describe and phrase as a structural impediment to women being involved in politics at any level—and that's what the member has done—I think it's incumbent upon us to do what we can to try to address that. This particular piece, instructed by the member from Kitchener Centre, Daiene Vernile, allows us that opportunity, should this legislation pass, to remove a structural impediment to the potential for women to choose to be involved in politics at any level. I thank her very much for her work on this file.

GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

Mrs. Julia Munro: My question today is for the Premier. Premier, documents recently obtained by the Canadian Taxpayers Federation reveal that your government spent nearly \$800,000 on new advertising after you cancelled the pension plan. This new ad promoted the federal government's proposed enhancement to the CPP, giving credit to this provincial Liberal government. It is news to me that provincial tax dollars can be spent promoting federal programs. The Auditor General described the ads as self-congratulatory.

These ads were partisan, plain and simple. Under the old rules, these ads would never have been approved. Premier, how can you claim that these ads are not partisan? How can you justify spending almost \$1 million to promote a program that you did not implement?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know the Minister of Finance is going to want to comment in the supplementary, but let me just say that before we put in place the rules around government advertising, I remember ads with Mike Harris's face on them, Mr. Speaker, where he was part of advertising, where they were blatantly political and blatantly paid for by government dollars.

1150

In fact, we're the government that brought in a new regime that has taken partisan politics out of advertising. We have done that; we will stand by that. We think that was the right thing to do. That may not have been what the party opposite chose to do, but we introduced those rules. We took partisan politics out of government advertising, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Julia Munro: Premier, you may try to claim that these ads aren't partisan, but they were created by the very same firm that does your election advertising and other Liberal political work, including ads for Dalton McGuinty, Justin Trudeau and Paul Martin.

The issue is that when you add up the \$8.2 million this government spent advertising the program when it was still in the works, and the additional \$800,000 after it was cancelled, it is clear that the people who really benefited from the plan were advertising firms and Liberal insiders.

The Auditor General's power to review government advertising for partisanship needs to be restored. Premier, when will you do the right thing and stop wasting taxpayer dollars?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: I recognize the member opposite and her party—and her leader, who stood as a federal member opposing CPP enhancement, who shut down the opportunity for us to provide retirement security for Ontarians and for Canadians. We stood in this House prompting and fighting for the people of Ontario and for Canada to ensure that we had that retirement security. We went forward. Had we not taken those steps, Mr. Speaker, CPP enhancement wouldn't be a reality today.

We're moving forward, and we are advising the people of Ontario about the merits and the reasons why we must provide for retirement security.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. I do suspect you were finished.

Also, one more reminder that we are in warnings.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Jennifer K. French: My question is to the Premier. People in my riding and across Durham region need to be able to count on our local hospitals, but this government keeps forcing our hospitals to cut front-line services. The forced merger of Ajax-Pickering hospital with Lakeridge Health has a price tag of \$18.2 million, but the province is refusing to foot the bill. That means that our local hospitals will be forced to find the money and forced to cut nearly \$20 million out of front-line services and patient care.

How on earth can the Premier defend deep cuts to hospitals in Oshawa and Durham that will only leave patients and families waiting longer for the health care that they need?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: In fact, the truth is that we're investing more in our hospitals in Scarborough and Durham. I was there earlier this year with my fellow caucus members from both Scarborough and Durham. We announced, in Scarborough, a \$20-million investment in a diagnostic suite for Scarborough Hospital. For Rouge Valley, we announced an increase of \$5 million for the ER. We're making investments as well in the hospitals at both Ajax-Pickering and further to the east in the Lakeridge hospital as well.

I'm very proud of the work that has been done over the course of the last year with the community, with specialists and with the hospitals themselves to chart a path forward which will actually look at health care requirements over the next couple of decades, Mr. Speaker. That will no doubt result in significant capital investments, with operating funds to go along with that, that will improve the health care of individuals both in Durham and in Scarborough.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Speaker, cutting health care and hospital services is what Conservatives do, but this Liberal government has a record of cutting just as deep.

The forced hospital merger will cost over \$18 million but save just \$300,000 per year. That means, Speaker, it will take 62 years to pay off the cost of this merger.

People inside the government are worried too, Speaker. At a community health care rally on November 5, I was joined by the Liberal MPP from Ajax-Pickering, who was there and who also wore a sign that said, "Save our hospital."

Speaker, when will the Premier listen to families and seniors in my community—and her own MPPs—and stop cutting health care in Oshawa and across Durham region?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I want to applaud the member from Ajax, who we have been working closely with on this issue for a long time. His leadership has resulted in a plan and a way forward for the hospital in Ajax-Pickering that serves that community as well as the broader west Durham area. His leadership has resulted in exceptional improvements and strengthening of the plan that was provided to me earlier this year. So I have to applaud his hard work. He has worked so consistently, and it has actually resulted, I believe, in delivering a great benefit to his local community, one that I intend on following through with.

INDIGENOUS RELATIONS

Mr. Arthur Potts: My question is to the Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation.

This week, First Nations leaders from across Ontario and Toronto are in Toronto to meet with the Premier and the ministers during the annual Leaders in the Legislature event. Having these stalwart representatives of their communities here at the Legislature, I know, is an important event for you, Speaker, as a proud member of the Métis Nation, as it is for me and all other members of the House.

The Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, in partnership with the Chiefs of Ontario, has worked hard to bring First Nations leadership together for this forum to discuss important events.

This is the last day of the meeting, Speaker, and I would like to know if the minister can elaborate on how the government is working to improve our relationships with First Nations through these meetings that will be taking place during the Leaders in the Legislature event.

Hon. David Zimmer: During Leaders in the Legislature, I and my colleagues are taking part in many round tables with First Nations chiefs to address a number of priority issues for First Nations, priority issues such as community safety, violence against indigenous women, treaty recognition, education, health and well-being, infrastructure and the environment.

Yesterday, I and the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services and the Attorney General met chiefs from across Ontario in the first of these round

tables. We are working towards a renewed relationship, a renewed government-to-government relationship, one that benefits First Nations and all Ontarians.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Arthur Potts: Back to the Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation: I would like to say that I believe that we have exactly the right minister in this role, who has forged such incredible relationships with First Nations in our province.

I'm glad to see that our government is upholding its commitments to engage with First Nations leaders to find collaborative solutions to challenges that are faced. I'm proud to be part of a government that is committed to working with First Nations and indigenous peoples in the spirit of the political accord that was signed with the Chiefs of Ontario last year.

The Leaders in the Legislature event presents a fantastic opportunity for our government and our First Nations leaders to further build on those commitments for mutual collaboration and to rebuild and renew our relationships.

Speaker, will the minister then elaborate on how our government is working with First Nations leaders to honour the political accord?

Hon. David Zimmer: The political accord signed by the Premier and the Ontario regional chief last year established a formal bilateral relationship at the political level, based on the treaty relationship. The Ontario regional chief said yesterday that our government has made good on our commitment to a renewed government-to-government relationship.

Through the accord, we are developing policies and initiatives such as the Leaders in the Legislature exercise. This drives progress for First Nations communities.

We look forward to continuing these discussions with the chiefs and to the upcoming meetings around the Leaders in the Legislature event.

HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENT

Mr. Todd Smith: My question this morning is for the Minister of Transportation. Back in the summer of 2015, I know that there was a presentation by members of Prince Edward county and the council there regarding the state of Highway 49, one of the major arteries that goes from the 401 into Prince Edward county. I know the mayor of Prince Edward county, Mr. Quaiff, had a meeting, and he brought big chunks of cement concrete that had popped out of Highway 49—truly a danger. The minister told representatives of the county at that time that this was no way to greet the many visitors to the county. We had a million visitors in Prince Edward county last year.

This year, after applying and being rejected for funding for County Road 49, County Road 49 in Prince Edward county was named CAA's worst road in Ontario. So I'm wondering, Mr. Speaker, when will the minister walk his talk and when will he step up and help Prince Edward county fix Highway 49?

1200

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I want to thank the member opposite for his question. He is indeed correct that I did have the opportunity, actually on more than one occasion, to meet with representatives from Prince Edward county to discuss County Road 49.

We on this side of the House understand why it is so important to invest in the roads, the bridges, the ferries, the transit projects that we have in every corner of the province. That would be why, over the last number of years, through budget after budget after budget, our Premier and our Minister of Finance have provided more funding so that we can help build Ontario up and move the province forward. That's why we're investing literally billions of dollars in the critical transportation infrastructure that we have in every corner of the province.

I certainly look forward to having the opportunity to continue to work with representatives from Prince Edward county, not only on projects like this one, but many others that I know are of particular importance to those folks. I'll be happy to provide more details in the follow-up.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Todd Smith: I thank the minister for that response. I know the people of Prince Edward county are waiting.

I know that the minister has actually seen the video that the mayor has taken driving County Road 49. He's the member that represents Vaughan, which of course has Canada's Wonderland, and driving on that road is very similar to riding one of the roller coasters at Canada's Wonderland. It's in very, very poor shape. That's why it's Ontario's worst road, according to the CAA.

The government spent millions putting county ads on television and that's resulted in the increased tourism that we've seen in Prince Edward county, which is a great thing. We thank them for doing that, but one of the biggest tourism draws in Prince Edward county is Sandbanks Provincial Park, so there's a lot of revenue being gained by the Ministry of Natural Resources.

Does the minister think it's fair that the government is increasing the traffic on Highway 49 but isn't helping to pay the municipality to get it repaired? This is in desperate need of repair.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I thank the member for the follow-up question. I also thank him for citing Canada's Wonderland. He is 100% right: It's located in my riding and it's a great fixture in my community.

I understand where the question is coming from, Speaker. I could stand here and I could rhyme off—and I'd be proud to do so—all of the projects, all of the programs that we have provided for: Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund, Connecting Links, our highways plan both in southern and northern Ontario.

I guess what I would say to the member opposite is, while I respect the spirit of the question and the place that it's coming from, I would say that over the next number of months, when the Minister of Finance presents his budget here in the Legislature, sometime in 2017—a

budget that will no doubt contain additional investments for infrastructure—hopefully the member from Prince Edward–Hastings will see the light, break with his own leader and finally support a budget that builds Ontario up.

HYDRO RATES

Ms. Catherine Fife: My question is to the Premier. Last week, during the Kitchener–Waterloo Santa Claus Parade, I learned that the Waterloo Knights of Columbus had gotten a 40% increase in their hydro bills over the course of the year. They are using the same amount of power but they are paying hundreds of dollars more than they paid last year—almost double.

When charities have to keep paying more for privatized power, this means they have less money for helping people. The not-for-profit sector in this province is hurting because of high hydro rates.

What will the Premier do to make sure that charities can use their money to help people instead of being forced to pay profits to private investors on their skyrocketing hydro bills?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: There are many things that we are doing to help not only charities and businesses right across the province, but families. It's something on this side of the House we're very proud of.

We've ensured that every family, every small business, and charities will get that 8% reduction on their bill come January 1. That's a significant reduction that charities can actually use and put toward their products.

For five years I ran the United Way in Sudbury and we ensured that we put every dollar into those programs. Great organizations like the Knights of Columbus, like many other charities, like the municipalities, are actually utilizing programs like the Save on Energy program. Saving money, saving energy and reducing our GHGs: That is something we should be proud of on all sides of this House, because we're keeping money in our pocket and we're helping our environment.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Again to the Premier: At the beginning of this year, the Premier insulted Ontarians who demanded lower hydro rates, claiming that they were really demanding a return to coal, denying that hydro rates were a crisis in the province of Ontario. Then she insulted their intelligence again by claiming that Ontario's hydro rates were perfectly reasonable, even as 60,000 families in this province were being cut off because they could no longer afford their hydro bill.

Now, after the insults and the misdirections have failed, she has decided to apologize for hydro rates. But she refuses to change the behaviour of this government.

Instead of empty apologies, will the Premier rein in hydro rates by stopping the further sell-off of Hydro One and put the people of this province first, above their interests?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: It was this Premier and the previous Minister of Energy who worked with the OEB and gave the OEB the power to ensure that there were no disconnections—10 days' notice on any disconnections—and that there were resources provided to these families to make sure that they didn't actually have to have their power cut off.

But what I do find very interesting is, we've got a great bill now being brought forward by the Ministry of Economic Development and Growth: Bill 27, the Burden Reduction Act. It has a clause that would allow the OEB to ban disconnections during the winter. That begs the question: Will the opposition plan to move unanimous consent to support Bill 27, so we can actually support more families quickly during the winter months?

It's all talk on that side of the House. There's never any action, and there's no plan.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mrs. Cristina Martins: My question is to the Minister of Finance. Minister, yesterday, you announced that the government will be launching pre-budget consultations in preparation for the 2017 budget. I know that these consultations provide an opportunity for people and communities to have their voices heard. I also know that these consultations serve as a way for the government to get input and ideas on how to build Ontario up and help people in their everyday lives.

Mr. Speaker, could the minister please explain what efforts Ontario is making to ensure all Ontarians have the opportunity to have their voices heard?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Thank you to the member for Davenport for the question and her desire and concern to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to participate in the development of our budget.

We believe every Ontarian has a stake in building Ontario up and planning for the future. Because the budget affects every Ontarian, this government believes that reaching out to as many people as possible across Ontario is important. It's important to strengthen our communities and improve our services, and we need ideas from the people in those communities. That's why we're gathering opinions and ideas from every corner of the province in as many ways as possible: in person, online, over the phone and by post mail.

In order to reach as many people as possible and in the most cost-effective way of doing so, we'll continue to find more innovative ways by using technology, including telephone town halls and online conversations.

We've been developing an online pre-budget consultation tool called Budget Talks. It's a public forum for everyone to submit their ideas and discuss ideas with others as well.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Scarborough–Agincourt on a point of order.

Ms. Soo Wong: I have four very special guests visiting Queen's Park today and I want all of us to welcome them: Pamela Hart from the Anduhyaun Inc. women's shelter; Lynda Allen, family traditional centre; Jiin Yiong, North York Women's Shelter; and Julia Fiddes of Women's Habitat of Etobicoke. They are here for today's Christmas gift-wrapping day. I want to encourage all of us to participate. Welcome, ladies, to Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you, and welcome.

Also, as is the custom of the Speaker to announce, in the members' gallery is the former member for York Mills in the 35th and 36th Parliaments, and the member for Don Valley West in the 37th Parliament, Mr. David Turnbull. Welcome, David.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

There are no deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1209 to 1500.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

SERVICES FOR THE DEAF

Mr. Ted Arnott: Mr. Speaker, during the summer, I had a remarkable meeting in our riding office with Mr. Chris Kenopic of Georgetown. Mr. Kenopic, who is deaf, challenges us in the Ontario Legislature to listen: to listen to the needs of the deaf, to hear them and to heed them. In health care, there has very little progress in improving mental health services for the deaf. Why has the government largely ignored this concern?

In education, there are regulations that interpreters must be available for deaf students, but school boards do not write or enforce the policies. What's the point of having regulations if they're not enforced?

In adult literacy, there needs to be better empirical analysis of the needs of the deaf so we can determine what's working and what we need to do to make improvements. How can we make a positive difference if we don't have reliable data?

In debate here at Queen's Park, we need to argue and bicker less, and work co-operatively and collaboratively more. How can we lead effectively if we appear to put partisan self-interest ahead of the public interest?

Ministries need to answer TTY, or text telephone systems, not just publish the contact info. What good is TTY if nobody bothers to answer?

I urge the government to reach out to Mr. Kenopic and review these concerns. Better yet, the relevant ministers should launch a broad consultation on these and other related issues that Ontario's deaf residents might identify.

Let us listen to the deaf, and let us work together across party lines to support improved services for them, ensuring that they have the same opportunity to reach

their full potential as the rest of us do as, together, we reach out to embrace the promise of the future.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, the government is going to be starting a series of consultations on child care, with a meeting to be held in my riding next week. I gather it's the only riding in Toronto that is going to have the honour of hosting this consultation process on child care.

There's no question that we need an investment in child care in this province. From the speech from the throne there was a commitment to put more money into child care. But I have to say that there are a few things that have to be kept in mind and, frankly, need to be addressed by the government.

What we have now is a patchwork—not a real system, just a patchwork of stand-alone institutions. We need to have a systemization, a structure, that will make sense for parents and for children.

We need an investment in lower fees. The city of Toronto finds that 75% of parents can't afford fees in this city. For families, it's an incredible burden. People need the money to come from the federal and provincial governments to make a difference on an ongoing basis to the fees that are a huge burden on them now.

Speaker, I also want to mention the fact that almost a quarter of early childhood educators, people who are fully trained, are making less than \$15 an hour. That, for this very sensitive work, is unsustainable.

We need child care, but we need a structure, we need lower fees and we need better wages for the workers.

PEDESTRIAN SUNDAYS IN KENSINGTON MARKET

Mr. Han Dong: Good afternoon. It's my pleasure to rise today to recognize and congratulate Pedestrian Sundays, a local festival that takes place in the great neighbourhood of Kensington Market, in my riding of Trinity-Spadina.

This year, Toronto's NOW magazine awarded Pedestrian Sundays with the 2016 Readers' Choice award for Toronto's Best Neighbourhood Festival for the fourth year in a row—amazing.

Pedestrian Sundays just completed its 13th season. By removing cars from the busy streets in Kensington and transforming it into a public space, Pedestrian Sundays is where Torontonians and tourists come together for a full day of food, dance, shopping, music and fun.

Thank you to the volunteers, the performers, the organizers and the Kensington Market BIA for making this a huge success.

I encourage members of this House and all Ontarians to visit the community everyone is talking about, Kensington Market. And be sure to visit Kensington Market on December 21 for the 27th annual Winter Solstice Parade, a night where families, neighbours and

communities gather together and celebrate the holidays in one of Toronto's most vibrant neighbourhoods.

NORTH BAY SANTA CLAUS PARADE

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Well, if the weather is any indication, the Christmas season is upon us. Last weekend, Patty and I had the pleasure of joining Santa and Mrs. Claus on their float in the annual North Bay Santa Claus Parade. Let me tell you, Speaker, this year's parade was, first of all, the best ever, but it was one of the coldest I ever remember being on that float. Yet the families of North Bay all bundled up, as they always do, and they came together in a celebration of friendship, love and community.

I rise today to encourage families across Ontario to celebrate with that same spirit this holiday season. This is a busy time of year for everyone, but now, more than ever, it is important for us to remember the importance of community. As we plan our Christmas parties, family dinners and gift giving, I ask all Ontarians to open your hearts and give to your local food drives and charities.

In celebrating the family and the warmth that surrounds us all, please take the time to share that same warmth with those less fortunate in your communities. Together, we can ensure that everyone in our province can stay warm and healthy during this holiday season. If we all dig just a little deeper and give a little more, we can all celebrate a merry Christmas.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Today I rise to raise the issue of violence against women. The United Nations has an initiative called Orange the World. It begins on November 25 for 16 days. It's an initiative to raise awareness about gender-based violence. It raises awareness of violence against women, and it provides an opportunity to raise finances, to raise resources to support initiatives that work towards ending and preventing violence against women.

It's something extremely important for us to realize that in society, this is too often a painful reality, that a vast number of women face this violence on a regular basis. In some countries, as much as 70% of women report some form of violence, physical or sexual, and often the vast majority of this violence is perpetrated by men.

It's absolutely important for us to look at some of the root causes of this violence. Cultures of violence, social norms and gender stereotypes help perpetuate this, but in addition we have to look at the power imbalance that exists in society. Only when we address the power imbalance as a result of lack of opportunities and lack of access to resources, education and employment—this power imbalance that perpetuates the exploitation of those who are more vulnerable. We need to look at that as a solution.

As a part of the solution, empowering women is obviously an important part, but as men form the majority of the perpetrators of this violence, it's incumbent on men to take a stance against violence against women in order that we can prevent and eventually end all forms of this violence.

ANTI-BULLYING INITIATIVES

Mr. John Fraser: It's a pleasure to stand up today and speak to Pink Shirt Day. I am not wearing a pink shirt—I want to say that right now. I found this morning when I went to the closet that my pink shirt was an artifact of a leaner time in my life. But I do want to commend many members of the Legislature. I can't name them all. I know the member from Bramalea-Gore-Malton is wearing a pink shirt. My colleague Han Dong is wearing a pink tie—I'm sure it wasn't the same reason as I had—and I can see the member from Kitchener Centre.

Pink Shirt Day is a day that stands up against all forms of bullying and discrimination. It started in 2007 when David Shepherd and Travis Price saw a grade 9 student in their high school being bullied for wearing a pink shirt. So what did they decide to do? They decided to tell everybody about what they were doing, go out and get 50 shirts and distribute them the next day.

1510

That's a really powerful message.

The message of today is, we need to stand up and speak out against bullying, against all forms of discrimination. We talked a bit last week about what we saw south of the border in the election. Now, more than ever, with that kind of political discourse, with that acceptance of people saying things about each other that are discriminatory and wrong and bullying, we need to stand up and speak out against bullying.

PKU TREATMENT

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Since 2015, I've been working with a family in Dufferin-Caledon whose daughter has PKU, a rare inherited brain-threatening metabolic disorder. For people with PKU, the threat of significant intellectual challenge never goes away, and they need treatment for life.

My constituent has been taking Kuvan as part of a SickKids drug trial for the past seven years. Once the trial ends, the drug cost of Kuvan will be a staggering \$170,000 a year. But recently, we had some good news. On October 26, the Common Drug Review recommended that the government should pay for Kuvan. Currently, the medication for PKU is supposedly available under the Exceptional Access Program, but the criteria are so restrictive that no application has ever been approved.

People with PKU have been waiting since 2010, when Health Canada approved Kuvan. Instead, people like my constituent are worried about their child's health and how

they can possibly handle the astronomical costs of their daughter's necessary medications.

Since Health Canada approved Kuvan in 2010 and the Common Drug Review made its recommendation in October, it's time for the minister to act and cover Kuvan for people with PKU.

ÉDUCATION POSTSECONDAIRE EN FRANÇAIS

M^{me} France Gélinas: Il y a un an de ça, l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario a voté de façon unanime en faveur de la création de l'Université de l'Ontario français. Nous célébrons aujourd'hui le premier anniversaire de ce vote historique, et j'en profite pour faire un peu un retour sur le travail accompli.

Dans un premier temps, au mois de février, le RÉFO, la FESFO et l'AFO ont organisé une journée universitaire sur le perron de Queen's Park pour célébrer, un an plus tard, le dépôt du rapport demandant la formation de l'université franco. En mars, le ministre des Collèges et Universités a reçu le rapport final de son comité d'étude qui recommande la formation de l'université franco.

Au mois de juin, on nous annonce une autre étude, et en septembre, suite à la prorogation, je redépose le projet de loi pour l'université franco. La même semaine, la ministre nomme M^{me} Dyane Adam comme présidente du Conseil de planification pour une université de langue française.

Donc, six mois après avoir annoncé le nouveau conseil, il n'y a toujours pas de membres, toujours pas de plan de travail, pas d'échéances. Il n'y a pas eu de réunions. Je vous dirais qu'on est au point fixe. On n'a pas avancé du tout. On fait du surplace et je rajouterais qu'on fait rire de nous autres.

Cette inaction n'est pas gratuite; elle est accompagnée de conséquences lourdes pour tous les francophones de l'Ontario qui veulent, en priorité, une université franco.

SISTERING

Mrs. Cristina Martins: I rise to commemorate the anniversary of Sistering. In 1980, a group of women came together to develop a strategy to meet the needs of the growing number of homeless and transient women in Toronto. The following year, they opened Sistering. Created for women who were leaving mental health facilities and had no place to go, it soon became clear that there were other marginalized and vulnerable women who could benefit from a safe space. Sistering grew to include women leaving abusive family situations, women who are widowed and pensionless, and young women involved in prostitution and drugs.

Sistering opened its first shelter in 1981, and despite moving between several locations in the past 30 years, it has always been a safe place for women in west Toronto. In 2007, Sistering found a home at 962 Bloor Street West, in my riding of Davenport. Since then, they have

been doing fantastic work for marginalized women looking for a safe and welcoming place to go to during the day. From hot breakfasts and lunches to helping women find stable, permanent housing, Sistering has been a crucial support to these women.

Last week, I was able to join them as they celebrated one year of being open 24 hours a day, seven days a week for those who need it most.

I want to congratulate the organization for 35 years of fantastic work in the community, and hope that there will be a great many more in the future.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their statements.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGULATIONS AND PRIVATE BILLS

Mr. Ted McMeekin: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. Trevor Day): Your committee begs to report the following bills without amendment:

Bill Pr50, An Act to revive Simple Stopwatch Inc.

Bill Pr52, An Act to revive All About Water Ltd.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Shall the report be received and adopted. Agreed? Agreed. Carried.

Report adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

SAFE ROUNDABOUTS ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR LA SÉCURITÉ DES CARREFOURS GIRATOIRES

Mr. Harris moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 72, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act to provide rules for the use of roundabouts / Projet de loi 72, Loi modifiant le Code de la route pour prévoir des règles régissant l'utilisation des carrefours giratoires.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Michael Harris: Speaker, this still amends the Highway Traffic Act, enabling the minister to make regulations establishing rules of the road that apply to roundabouts.

Before making a regulation, the minister must conduct a study about the safe use of roundabouts and must consult with members of the public. Finally, the minister is required to table a progress report in the Legislative Assembly every year until the regulation is made.

REPRESENTATION AMENDMENT ACT
(WAHNAPIITAE FIRST NATION), 2016

LOI DE 2016 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR LA REPRÉSENTATION ÉLECTORALE
(PREMIÈRE NATION DE WAHNAPIITAE)

M^{me} Gélinas moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 73, An Act to amend the Representation Act, 2015 to include Wahnapiitae Indian Reserve No. 11 in the electoral district of Nickel Belt rather than in the electoral district of Timiskaming-Cochrane / Projet de loi 73, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2015 sur la représentation électorale pour inclure la réserve indienne Wahnapiitae n°11 dans la circonscription électorale de Nickel Belt au lieu de la circonscription électorale de Timiskaming-Cochrane.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

M^{me} France Gélinas: The bill amends the schedule to the Representation Act, 2015, which sets out the 11 northern electoral districts in Ontario. The amendment changes the boundaries of two electoral districts so that Wahnapiitae First Nation is included in the electoral district of Nickel Belt rather than the electoral district of Timiskaming-Cochrane.

TRANS DAY OF REMEMBRANCE
ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR LA JOURNÉE
DU SOUVENIR TRANS

Ms. DiNovo moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 74, An Act to proclaim the Trans Day of Remembrance / Projet de loi 74, Loi proclamant la Journée du souvenir trans.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: The bill proclaims November 20 in each year as the Trans Day of Remembrance. The bill requires the members of the Legislative Assembly to observe a moment of silence in honour of trans people who have died as a result of anti-trans violence.

1520

PETITIONS

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition with regard to electricity rates, and it reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas electricity rates have risen by more than 300% since the current government took office;

"Whereas over half of Ontarians' power bills are regulatory and delivery charges and the global adjustment;

"Whereas the global adjustment is a tangible measure of how much Ontario must overpay for unneeded wind and solar power, and the cost of offloading excess power to our neighbours at a loss;

"Whereas the market rate for electricity, according to IESO data, has been less than three cents per kilowatt hour to date in 2016, yet the government's lack of responsible science-based planning has not allowed these reductions to be passed on to Ontarians, resulting in electrical bills several times more than that amount;

"Whereas the implementation of cap-and-trade will drive the cost of electricity even higher and deny Ontarians the option to choose affordable natural gas heating;

"Whereas more and more Ontarians are being forced to cut down on essential expenses such as food and medicines in order to pay their increasingly unaffordable electricity bills;

"Whereas the ill-conceived energy policies of this government that ignored the advice of independent experts and government agencies, such as the Ontario Energy Board (OEB) and the independent electrical system operator (IESO), and are not based on science have resulted in Ontarians' electricity costs rising, despite lower natural gas costs and increased energy conservation in the province;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To take immediate steps to reduce the total cost of electricity paid for by Ontarians, including costs associated with power consumed, the global adjustment, delivery charges, administrative charges, tax and any other charges added to Ontarians' energy bills."

I support this petition and give it to page Sage from Huntsville.

AIR-RAIL LINK

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Union-Pearson Express (UPX) does not serve the communities through which it passes;

"Whereas the UPX fare is priced beyond the reach of most commuters and is not integrated with existing transit systems;

"Whereas diesel trains are a health hazard for people who live near them, and all major cities in the world with train service between their downtown core and the airport use electric trains;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the province of Ontario electrify the route immediately and build additional stops along the route;

"That the UPX be priced level with the Toronto Transit Commission fare as an affordable transportation option between all points along its route."

I couldn't agree more. I'm going to sign it and give it to Charlie to be delivered to the table.

GO TRANSIT

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I have a petition here:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Cambridge, Ontario, is a municipality of over 125,000 people, many of whom commute into the greater Toronto area daily;

"Whereas the current commuting options available for travel between the Waterloo region and the GTA are inefficient and time-consuming, as well as environmentally damaging;

"Whereas the residents of Cambridge and the Waterloo region believe that they would be well-served by commuter rail transit that connects the region to the Milton line, and that this infrastructure would have positive, tangible economic benefits to the province of Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Direct crown agency Metrolinx to commission a feasibility study into building a rail line that connects the city of Cambridge to the GO train station in Milton, and to complete this study in a timely manner and communicate the results to the municipal government of Cambridge."

I will sign this petition and send it to the desk with William.

TAXATION

Mr. Victor Fedeli: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas life under this Liberal government has become more and more unaffordable;

"Whereas Ontarians' assets are already taxed multiple times throughout their lives;

"Whereas the Liberal government has raised taxes through new eco fees, a health tax, and increased income taxes multiple times;

"Whereas the death tax in Ontario is the highest of any province in Canada;

"Whereas the last thing a grieving family should worry about is the taxman at their door;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ontario government repeal the estate administration tax immediately."

I sign this and give it to page Vishmen.

LOGEMENTS POUR PERSONNES ÂGÉES

Mr. John Vanthof: « À l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario :

« Attendu que les personnes âgées habitant au deuxième étage de la Villa Aubin située au 145 rue

Holditch à Sturgeon Falls Ontario doivent utiliser l'escalier afin d'accéder à leur appartement;

« Attendu que ces personnes âgées sont confrontées à des difficultés croissantes en ce qui a trait à l'usage de ces escaliers;

« Attendu que cet accès restreint pourrait entraîner des conséquences néfastes relatives aux soins de santé, telles que l'accès avec des brancards;

« Attendu que divers paliers gouvernementaux ont annoncé du financement pour des fins de rénovations/améliorations aux logements pour personnes âgées;

« Par conséquent, nous, les soussignés, pétitionnons l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario comme suit :

« De charger le ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement à travailler avec la Société de logement du district de Nipissing afin d'obtenir du financement pour l'installation d'un ascenseur dans ce, et autres bâtiments d'accès restreint pour personnes âgées. »

I wholeheartedly agree, affix my signature and send it down with page Fallon.

GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Mr. Jim McDonell: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Ontarians rely on ServiceOntario locations to access public services such as health cards, vital statistics and land registry services;

"Whereas Ontarians in rural areas are unable to drive long distances to an alternative ServiceOntario location;

"Whereas the duty of government is to provide and preserve its ability to provide services to the public;

"Whereas the planned closure of nine ServiceOntario locations, including Morrisburg, is an affront to Ontarians' right to receive the public services they helped build with their hard-earned tax dollars;

"Whereas the displacement of land registry offices will create additional costs to the public as legal professionals and municipal officials will need to travel outside their municipality;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To halt the closure of nine public ServiceOntario locations, including Morrisburg, unless the continued local in-person delivery of ServiceOntario services in those communities can be guaranteed."

I agree with this and will pass it on to page Emma-Rose.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Speaker, I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that is called, "Support Survivors of Domestic Violence and Sexual Violence.

"Whereas half of all Canadian women have experienced at least one incident of physical or sexual violence

in their lifetime, and approximately every six days a woman in Canada is killed by her intimate partner; and

“Whereas a 2014 national survey showed that Canadian workers who experience domestic violence often disclose the violence to a co-worker, and that the violence frequently follows the worker to work; and

“Whereas the experience of domestic violence and sexual violence can cause significant physical, mental, emotional and financial hardship for survivors, their families, and society as a whole; and

“Whereas Canadian employers lose \$78 million annually due to domestic violence, and \$18 million due to sexual violence, because of direct and indirect impacts that include distraction, decreased productivity, and absenteeism; and

“Whereas workers who experience domestic violence or sexual violence should not have to jeopardize their employment in order to seek medical attention, access counselling, relocate, or deal with police, lawyers or the courts; and

“Whereas the final report of the Select Committee on Sexual Violence and Harassment recommended that the Ontario government make education about domestic or intimate partner violence in the workplace mandatory for managers, supervisors, and workers;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Legislative Assembly pass Bill 26 to provide employees who have experienced domestic violence or sexual violence (or whose children have experienced domestic violence or sexual violence) with up to 10 days of paid leave, reasonable unpaid leave, and options for flexible work arrangements, and to require employers to provide mandatory workplace training about domestic violence and sexual violence.”

I couldn't agree with this petition more, will affix my name to it and will give it to page Charlie to take to the table.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Petitions? Whoa, easy. The member from Kitchener Centre.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT

Ms. Daiene Vernile: Thank you very much, Speaker; I appreciate that. This is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas one in three women will experience some form of sexual assault in her lifetime.

“When public education about sexual violence and harassment is not prioritized, myths and attitudes informed by misogyny become prevalent. This promotes rape culture.

1530

“Less than 10% of sexual violence cases are reported to police. For every 33 that are reported, only three result in a conviction....

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“Support the findings and recommendations of the Select Committee on Sexual Violence and Harassment's final report, highlighting the need for inclusive and open dialogue to address misogyny and rape culture; educate about sexual violence and harassment to promote social change; and address attrition rates within our justice system, including examining ‘unfounded’ cases, developing enhanced prosecution models and providing free legal advice for survivors.”

I agree with this petition and I will sign it and hand it to page David. Thank you so much, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thanks.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition with regard to school closures in Honey Harbour.

“SOS Save our Schools—Honey Harbour Petition.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board and the Trillium Lakelands District School Board both plan to conduct pupil accommodation reviews with the intent of closing both Our Lady of Mercy Catholic School and Honey Harbour Public School;

“Whereas the loss of both schools in Honey Harbour will further destabilize the community and impede on elementary students' ability to attend school within a reasonable distance;

“Whereas the lack of a local school will negatively impact those students with special needs, accessibility challenges, students of a young age and those living below the poverty level;

“Whereas the prosperity, productivity and participation of local children depends on a viable, accessible school;

“Whereas there are no other elementary schools to serve Georgian Bay township's population within less than a 55-minute bus drive;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“We petition the Minister of Education to work with said school boards to co-locate both schools into one location in Honey Harbour, thus protecting the quality and child-focused education that the residents of Georgian Bay township require and deserve.”

I support this petition. I've signed it, and I am going it to give it to page Lauren.

KOMOKA PROVINCIAL PARK

Ms. Peggy Sattler: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Remove the new fees from Komoka Provincial Park.

“Whereas Komoka Provincial Park has long served residents and visitors to London, offering free access to beautiful views and numerous recreational hiking trails; and

“Whereas evidence has shown that access to the natural environment helps to reduce stress, improve

mental well-being, and lower risk for chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart attacks and cancer; and

“Whereas new parking fees ranging from \$5.75 to \$14.50 for daily use of Komoka Provincial Park have been imposed without consultation and without additional amenities to justify the new costs, appearing to be simply a cash grab by the Liberal government; and

“Whereas the lack of bike lanes and bus routes connecting Komoka Provincial Park to London, and the prohibition on roadside parking, requires almost all visitors to drive to the park and pay to park their vehicles; and

“Whereas the new fees are likely to decrease park visits with negative consequences for community health and well-being;

“Therefore, we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry eliminate the parking fees introduced in August 2016 to ensure that Komoka Provincial Park remains accessible to residents of the city of London and all Ontarians.”

I support this petition fully and will give it to page Adrian to take to the table.

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Todd Smith: I have a petition of concern to a large number of residents in Prince Edward–Hastings, particularly Prince Edward county.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas industrial wind turbine developments have raised concerns among citizens over health, safety and property values; and

“Whereas the Green Energy Act allows wind turbine developments to bypass meaningful public input and municipal approvals;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Ministry of the Environment revise the Green Energy Act to allow full public input and municipal approvals on all industrial wind farm developments; and

“That the Minister of the Environment conduct a thorough scientific study on the health and environmental impacts of industrial wind turbines.”

I agree with this petition, will sign it and send it to the table with page Victoria.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Mr. Wayne Gates: “Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the provincial government is creating a privatization scheme that will lead to higher hydro rates, lower reliability, and hundreds of millions less for our schools, roads, and hospitals; and

“Whereas the privatization scheme will be particularly harmful to northern and First Nations communities; and

“Whereas the provincial government is creating this privatization scheme under a veil of secrecy that means

Ontarians don’t have a say on a change that will affect their lives dramatically; and

“Whereas it is not too late to cancel the scheme;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the province of Ontario immediately cancel its scheme to privatize Ontario’s Hydro One.”

I agree with this petition and I’ll sign my name to it.

ENERGY POLICIES

Mr. Victor Fedeli: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Auditor General of Ontario defines the global adjustment charge on hydro bills as ‘an extra payment covered by ratepayers over and above the actual market price of electricity’; and

“Whereas wind power is simply unreliable, blows mostly at night when we don’t need power, creating a surplus Ontario then has to get rid of by paying Quebec and the United States to take it, and the total cost of producing the exported power was about \$2.6 billion more than the revenue Ontario received from exporting that power between 2006 and 2013; and

“Whereas the Auditor General says the global adjustment has risen from \$700 million prior to the Green Energy Act to \$7.7 billion by 2013, and over the past decade, the cumulated amount is about \$50 billion; and

“Whereas Ontario now has the highest industrial rates in North America, and residential hydro bills are forecast to increase 42% by 2018 after peak hydro rates have already more than tripled since 2003; and

“Whereas local First Nations, property owners and aviation and aerospace industry stakeholders have voiced concerns about wind farm installations proposed ... in the riding of Nipissing;

“We, the undersigned, do hereby petition the government of Ontario to reverse course on these proposed wind projects and the government’s expensive energy policy by cancelling feed-in-tariff (FIT) subsidies, implementing an immediate moratorium on wind power development, and giving municipalities veto authority over wind projects in their communities.”

Speaker, I sign my name to this and give it to page Calida.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUILDING ONTARIO UP FOR EVERYONE ACT (BUDGET MEASURES), 2016

LOI DE 2016 VISANT À FAVORISER L’ESSOR DE L’ONTARIO POUR TOUS (MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 22, 2016, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 70, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various statutes / *Projet de loi 70, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter et à modifier diverses lois.*

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I believe Mr. Fedeli has the floor.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Thank you very much, Speaker. I encourage you to settle in, relax and enjoy a water. I'm going to speak for an hour—well, 55 minutes. I used five minutes the other day.

I will tell you, Speaker, it will be, as far as my wife, Patty, is concerned, an enjoyable time to watch her friend Vic perform for 55 minutes. She's home baking Christmas cookies for—North Bay has a walk next week—the downtown walk. Patty is making 40 dozen of them today. She's watching the tube and baking 40 dozen cookies for—

Interjection.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Well, she also will bake 300 dozen before the season is over for my former co-workers at city hall in North Bay, in my days as mayor, and my office, family and friends. That's how I'd like to open this, by just giving a warm Christmas message to all those we're going to be seeing in North Bay this coming Friday for the Christmas walk. It's going to be beautiful.

Speaker, a couple of days ago, we had the presentation of the fall economic statement in the media studio. I've got two pages of notes that I read that day which I want to reiterate, but the very first sentence I read was, "The Wynne Liberal government is artificially balancing the budget in an election year, before plunging the province back into deficit." That has not only become a fact; this was borne out by the Financial Accountability Officer only a week before we received this bill, Bill 70, that we're debating here for the next hour.

I want to veer slightly for the moment because this morning, the Financial Accountability Officer presented yet another paper, a book called *Cap and Trade: An Assessment of the Fiscal Impact of Cap and Trade*. Speaker, in this book he reiterates over and over—as I told the finance minister this morning, pick a page. It doesn't matter what page you go to; he talks about the fact that—page 1, the first page: He says that the cap-and-trade money will be used to "reduce the deficit" now "and increase the deficit ... in future years." It bears out this point, Speaker, that the government is artificially balancing the budget. Page 5 explains that as well. He talks about the cap and trade "resulting in the cap-and-trade ... reducing deficits." Page 16: "The result would be a reduction in the deficit...." This is the tool that they're using.

1540

How they're doing it: He explains it on page 5 as well. It's a little technical, but basically, he says, "If the province does not spend all of the cash raised through cap and trade, revenues could exceed expenses in the year in which cash remains unspent." What he is saying is that the money will come in before the budget, they'll announce this surplus or that the deficit has been beaten

and they have a small surplus, but the very next day, when they pay the bills, we'll plunge back into deficit. That is from our Financial Accountability Officer.

We're on to them, Speaker. The game has been exposed. We said this on the Hydro One sale. We said it three weeks ago when the Financial Accountability Officer brought out his pre-fall-economic-statement analysis. He told us right then and there: "Watch out. They're telling you they're going to be out of deficit, but they're not." He forecast a deficit of \$2.6 billion. That's the real deficit; the fake deficit that they're going to bring is going to come from the fact that they're booking revenue without the expenses. That's one-time revenue from the sale of Hydro One, one-time revenue from selling the OPG headquarters across the street, and one-time revenue from selling the LCBO warehouse facility on the lake lands. This is one-time revenue that they're going to use to gin up the revenue. That revenue doesn't repeat next year, but all the expenses are still there. This is what we're getting at.

It has been laid bare now. There are no more questions about this. It has been laid bare: The Wynne Liberal government is going to attempt to artificially balance the budget just in time for the election, June 7, 2018, from the budget that they present in March 2017. So we go from March—we go into a May election period: "Look at us. We have a balanced budget." They'll pat themselves on the back.

But the Financial Accountability Officer has told us that is not accurate. He has told us they're going to artificially balance. In fact, he says it gets worse. The Financial Accountability Officer says these numbers are not true. They're not accurate. It's not going to be a balanced deficit—it's going to be a deficit of \$2.6 billion. And it gets worse: Each year, for the next five years, we're back to plunging deficits.

I can only stress to the people of Ontario that the numbers that you are given by the Ministry of Finance and the Minister of Finance are not the same numbers that are given by the independent Financial Accountability Officer. He works for all three parties. His numbers and the numbers from the Auditor General—those are the numbers. Speaker, it's always the Auditor General, the Financial Accountability Officer or the OPP that gets us to the truth when it comes to any numbers, any information, this government turns over to us.

Again, despite the warnings of the Financial Accountability Officer that we're going to plunge into deficit, the finance minister has claimed Ontario will see a balanced budget, in the fall economic statement. I can only stress that you have a choice to listen to the numbers from the Financial Accountability Officer or from the Minister of Finance, who—I'm going to go through some of the minister's other statements in a moment. Quite frankly, it will come down to: Who do you trust?

We believe that there is a trust deficit in this province, and, according to the Financial Accountability Officer, there's also a financial deficit. Either way, we're surrounded by deficits.

In order to balance in 2017-18, in addition to the fire sale of assets, we also see the government using the reserve, a contingency fund. Speaker, it's like your emergency bank account for a horrendous wind storm—things like that. As a former mayor, I can tell you: We have a reserve. I know that when I was mayor of the city of North Bay, our reserve was \$4.5 million, the lowest in the province of Ontario. It was in terrible shape. We did all kinds of things, over the seven years I was there, to prop up the reserves. We got them up to over \$20 million because, in the time I was mayor, we had two horrific wind storms that cost us millions and millions of dollars. Thankfully, we had that reserve.

They are tapping \$600 million out of the—that's one time. You don't have \$600 million every year to tap, Speaker. They're using this habit of one-time money and the one-time sale of government assets—hundreds of millions of dollars, which amount to more than \$1 billion.

Again, the Financial Accountability Officer has said to this Legislature that the Liberal government is using one-time money from the sale of assets and from contingency funds to artificially balance the budget. The fall economic statement, which we're debating here today, confirms—their own document confirms—that they're doubling down on this reckless strategy. It's unsustainable.

We have what's called a structural deficit. That means that we spend more money every year than we take in. If you artificially take in a bunch of money from selling an asset, that doesn't fix your spending problem; it masks it for one year. The year they're going to mask it is the year of the election.

It was also confirmed in the document that the province's net debt—this is the net debt. I just want to go back for a minute, because he's going to tell us that the net debt is going to rise by \$64 billion by 2021. In 1990—it's not all that long ago; it's within our recent memory—the net debt in Ontario was \$40 billion. It took 130-some-odd years to get it to \$40 billion, but today, they're going to add \$64 billion between now and 2020-21. That's going to bring us to a record \$370 billion. We will continue to be the largest subnational debtor on the entire planet and yet the most heavily taxed province in the country. How are you the most heavily taxed and the largest subnational debtor on the planet? The two numbers do not make any sense together.

At nearly \$11.8 billion a year, interest on that debt is now over—well, approximately \$1 billion a month. That's just in interest. To put that in perspective, Ontario now pays more in interest than it does on post-secondary education and community safety as well as half-a-dozen other ministries combined. That is what we pay every month in interest.

Because we're in deficit, that means we're borrowing to pay the interest. At home, you can't do that. This is absolutely parallel to using your Visa card every month to pay off your MasterCard. That's exactly what this is doing. You're borrowing from one to pay the other, and

back and forth every single month. We're borrowing money just to pay the interest on the debt we owe. That is absolutely, astoundingly horrific for seniors, for families, for the services that (a) that money could be being spent on, and (b) we're not seeing—the cuts to front-line health care, the cuts in education.

1550

The fall economic statement of this week is more of the same tired, self-interested Liberal government deals: higher taxes, higher service fees, more debt and deficit, and more unaffordable life for Ontario families and seniors.

If you drive a car, if you go hunting or camping or fishing, if you're getting married, if you're needing a licence of some sort, all these costs are going up. Speaker, \$503 million in the last four years is how much drivers' licences and vehicle registration have increased. That is a cash grab from a cash-hungry Liberal government. Half a billion dollars: That's just the increase in licence and vehicle registration fees. That's just the increase in these last few years. If you drive a car, you pay more. If you go hunting or fishing or camping, you pay more. No matter what you do in the province of Ontario, you pay more.

I know these statistics and figures really irk the government when we bring these up. I know that. Our finance minister stood up and gave his remarks at the announcement of the fall economic statement. He said some things that I want to challenge and perhaps provide facts that maybe bring into question exactly what was said. All the facts that I'm going to use come from the minister's own ministry.

In the press conference, in the media studio, he said, "Ontario has a faster growth rate than the United States." Well, what he failed to mention was that's not entirely accurate. Arkansas, Washington, Oregon, to name three: They add annualized growth rates of 3.9%, considerably and markedly higher than Ontario's. So when he says we have faster growth rates than the US, I presume the minister doesn't include the states that are doing well. That's the only way you can come up with a sentence like that. It is not accurate. It's not correct when you've got states that have annualized growth rates almost double that of Ontario's. That was number one. It really bothered me when he said that, and I believe I corrected him in the media studio.

He also said—and you've heard this so many times in this Legislature. When we talk about economic development, the minister will stand up and say, "We're the number one jurisdiction in the world for foreign direct investment." How many times have we heard the minister say that? I honestly couldn't count how many times he has said it. But sadly, he made a mistake here.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: He didn't say that; he said "North America."

Mr. Victor Fedeli: In his own ministry documents, we have seen now that no, we're not the number one jurisdiction for foreign direct investment. We're not, in North America. I may have said "the world" earlier; I

meant North America. I apologize. He may have said “the world” because I quoted him in the documents. Let me just fix that right here. “The number one jurisdiction in North America for foreign direct investment.” Oops, we’re not. We fell from number one to number four. We are not the number one jurisdiction for foreign direct investment.

He may continue to say that. I stood in the media studio immediately after him and said, “Let me offer a correction. We are not number one. We are number four.” We fell by several hundred million dollars. I’ll give you the accurate number in a moment when I get into my deeper dive here.

He also talked about our exports and how we’re on fire with our exports. Well, sadly, I have to report what the Ministry of Finance told us. His own ministry told us that in the second quarter of 2016, our exports fell by 3.3%. That’s the reality.

I realize that the facts don’t quite line up with the minister’s narrative. It sounds great—it does sound great—when he stands and says all these beautiful things about Ontario. It’s the Ontario I wish we had. It’s the Ontario we used to have, back in the day. I look at our northern development and mines critic, who will remind me that in 2003—

Mr. Norm Miller: We were number one.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: —we were the number one mining jurisdiction in the world—number one.

I’ll ask the member to bring me up to date. Is it 31?

Mr. Norm Miller: I think it’s 16.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: We’re number 16, Speaker. We’ve fallen to 16th place in the world, from the number one mining jurisdiction.

This is the Ontario they don’t like to talk about, but it’s the Ontario that is the reality. They do not express things in reality. They express things that are aspirational. Yes, we would all aspire to being back to where we were in 2003. We all aspire to that.

Here’s another number. Back in 2003, our debt-to-GDP—this is a bit of a financial description—was 27%. Today, our debt-to-GDP is over 40%.

Again, in the government’s own budget and fall economic statement, they continue to say, “We want to have our debt-to-GDP”—they call it “the pre-recession level of 2008.” They say that, to try to make it sound like it was the recession that brought it from 27% to 40%. They say, “We want to get it back down to the pre-recession level of 27%.”

Well, it was a little more than the recession. They only like to use that word to blame it on the recession. What they really are saying is, “We want to get it down to the pre-Liberal number of 27%,” because that’s where it was when they took office. It has escalated to 40%, and it went higher. In this fall economic statement, the debt-to-GDP grew—the whole plan. They keep telling us that it’s going to go down, but it keeps going up. Every time they tell us it’s going to go down, it goes up. So, again, it’s aspirational. They want to see it go down. They’re crossing their fingers and wishing it was going to go

down, but the actual reality is, it went up again. Our debt-to-GDP is now over 40%.

This just tells you basically what we learned from the Financial Accountability Officer’s document: There’s no plan to reduce that, because it’s on its way up. There’s no plan to reduce that.

Speaker, I said to the media gallery that day, after correcting and bringing this information out—three minutes after the minister had the three statements that are not reflective of his own ministry’s announcements.

If you can’t trust the minister’s announcements in that room, if you can’t trust that on these smaller items—and they’re not small. They’re not big, but they’re not earth-shattering on their own. Collectively and cumulatively, this is starting to hurt Ontario, but individually—but if you can’t trust the minister on these, how can you trust the minister when he comes out and says, “We’re going to balance in 2017-18”?

It’s the same fuzzy logic. It’s the same fuzzy math that’s used in saying, “We have a faster growth rate than the US.” No.

“We’re the number one jurisdiction in North America for foreign direct investment.” Uh-uh. It fell by hundreds of millions.

“Our debt-to-GDP: We plan to have our debt-to-GDP fall back to pre-recession levels.” Well, it’s going up every year, so where’s that plan?

“Our exports are robust.” Well, they fell by 3.3%.

So I’m very concerned when I hear the minister tell us one thing when his own ministry tells us something that, quite frankly, is completely opposite to that.

Let’s take a little deeper dive into some of these statistics, because these are all the notes that fell out of the minister’s fall economic statement, which we’re debating here today.

He talks about our provincial economy growing stronger. Again, I’m going to repeat some of what I said, but I’m going to get into some real specifics here now.

The Ministry of Finance indicated that Ontario’s economic growth was only 0.2% for the second quarter of 2016 as a result of poor economic performance. This is quite simply a fact. The ministry also stated that the economy is only on pace to grow by an annual rate of 0.7%.

1600

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Point of order, the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka.

Mr. Norm Miller: Do we have a quorum here?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Could the Clerk check for a quorum, please?

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): A quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker ordered the bells rung.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): A quorum is now present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Nipissing can continue.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: The Ministry of Finance indicated that Ontario’s economic growth was only 0.2% for the

second quarter of 2016 as a result of poor performance. This is the Ministry of Finance telling us that. That's quite different than the minister saying that we're the number one jurisdiction.

Speaker, the ministry also stated that the economy is only on pace to grow by an annual rate of 0.7%. Minister Sousa himself characterized it as "slow growth."

The government's previous projection of annual economic growth was 2.2%.

The Financial Accountability Officer noted to us that each percentage point decline in economic growth is estimated to lower the province's total revenue by \$885 million. When the minister tells us that growth is robust and we learn from his own ministry that it's not, and then we learn from the Financial Accountability Officer that each percentage point decline is almost \$1 billion, we understand why they're scrambling now. Their revenue is in jeopardy, so they've got to look to sell something—the OPG building across the street, the LCBO building on the lakelands, the fire sale of Hydro One. And now, of course, this morning it was confirmed that the revenue from cap-and-trade will indeed be used to artificially bring the deficit down.

The minister continues to tell us that the government has presided over a wave of unprecedented job creation. This is their talking point. Sadly, there are two points that don't quite line up with their narrative. The facts—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Maybe the member from Beaches–East York would like to get in his seat.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: The facts do not line up with the narrative that the Liberal government tells us. First of all, under this government, we've seen over 350,000 good-paying manufacturing jobs leave the province. We've seen that. But the most important statistic that we need to address when it comes to their telling us that there's unprecedented job creation happening in Ontario—the most important is to look at the Ministry of Finance's own confidential advice to cabinet. This is their own document, which revealed to us: "There are fewer jobs today" relative to the population "than before the recession, in other words, employment growth has not kept up with the growth of the working age population."

They can continue to tell us one thing, as we've seen them do, but their own ministry documents continue to tell both of them in confidence, and us through freedom of information, the real truth. We know that what they're telling us is absolutely a narrative only; it is not based in fact at all.

Again, I said earlier that the minister tells us that we're the number one jurisdiction in North America for foreign direct investment.

Mr. Han Dong: Yes.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: No. No. Let me read to you: "Foreign direct investment in Ontario has fallen off sharply in the past year. The annual report from fDi Intelligence shows Ontario has dropped" from number one to fourth place in North America, because they fell from \$7 billion in investment to \$4 billion.

You can't continue to say something that is not accurate any longer. I know they hearken back to 2003, to all the statistics, when we were the number one jurisdiction in mining in the world; today we fell to number 16. We were the number one jurisdiction for foreign direct investment; we fell to number four. You can't have the minister continue to stand here and say these things, hearkening back to the good old days before this government was in office, back in the days when electricity rates were 4.3 cents versus, where I live in the country, 26 cents at peak hours per kilowatt.

Mr. Norm Miller: We're number one in debt.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: We're number one in debt. If you want the number one, that's exactly where we are: We're the number one subnational debtor on the planet. That's your bragging rights.

So sadly, Speaker, when I about back to foreign direct investment, "Ontario's market share has been cut in half from 12% in 2015 to just 6% this year."

These are the facts. I know it's painful for the members of the government because it doesn't line up with the narrative they spin every day. I understand that, how hard it is for them to face facts: that they have gutted Ontario's manufacturing, they've hurt families, they've hurt seniors. This is the reality that we live in.

Here's another one, where they talk about how they're going to balance the budget by 2017-18. Only a government who's about to have nine consecutive deficits—nine in a row—only this government would boast that they'd had nine deficits in a row. As I said earlier, think back to 1990. Our debt in Ontario in the good old days was \$40 billion. Today it's \$340 billion. When this government took office, it took 137 years to get our debt in Ontario up to \$139 billion—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Second time for the member from Trinity–Spadina. You're mumbling all the time he's talking, and I can hear it.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Yes, keep it up.

Continue.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Thank you, Speaker. When we talk about debt and deficit—when this government took office, our debt in Ontario was \$139 billion. It took 137 years to get it to \$139 billion. They more than doubled it in 10 years, and now, according to the Financial Accountability Officer, that debt is set to rise another \$64 billion by 2020-21. It's set to rise to \$370 billion. Again, when they took office, after 137 years, it was \$139 billion. We're talking \$370 billion of debt. That's their achievement. That's their accomplishment.

The Financial Accountability Officer told us that not only will we not balance the budget in 2017-18, as the government says—that it will be a \$2.6-billion deficit—our deficit is set to grow each year for the next five years after that. That's remarkably different than the picture painted by the government, all because they're going to

present an artificially balanced budget by 2017-18 using one-time money.

1610

The FAO told us we will be plunging back into deficit. He also told us that the only way they're going to balance after that is to raise taxes or cut services further. I'll talk about both of those in their tax-and-spend portion when I get to the next section. Remember, he told us they're going to raise taxes or cut services further.

Again, the government tells us that unemployment is falling to a historic low of 6.6%. I remember that before this government came into office, unemployment was routinely below 6%. I remember that well. Those were the days when I was in the mayor's office in North Bay and our unemployment in the city was between 4% and 5%, which is a pretty average turnover in the course of a year and almost makes it effectively zero unemployment, because people would leave and others would be hired.

The government talks about where we are, and it's not accurately portrayed. When they talk about exports growing—they continue to tell us that; I hear many ministers talk about that. Ontario's economic accounts—that's a file; that's data that we get—for the second quarter of 2016 noted that the province's exports declined by 3.3%. Again, this was largely led by a significant decline in the export of international goods, including motor vehicles and consumer goods. That's the reality.

They also continue to say that the Auditor General ambushed them with the sudden change to an accounting rule—ambushed. Speaker, both the Auditor General and the Ministry of Finance have now confirmed that the Auditor General notified the government of their accounting change back in June 2016, months before the tabling of public accounts. In fact, if they were paying attention at all to the Auditor General's December 2015 report, Bonnie Lysyk, our Auditor General, spent a considerable number of pages of that AG's report in December precisely on this issue: warning that this was going to be changing. That's almost a year before this "ambush" took place.

Even the government's own technical briefing—I was at the technical briefing. The handout that they gave us outlined a timeline page. It quite clearly defines, in June under the timeline, "Revised Audit Planning Report issued by AG reflects review of accrued pension benefit assets." She told them in December she was doing it; they acknowledged in June that they'd better shape up and it was coming; and then when she would not sign—unprecedented—they released financial accounts in the province of Ontario without an auditor signing. That's a sign of desperation of this government. It's the first time in the history of our province that that happened, that the auditor would not sign off on the documents.

We know why. We heard the excuses. They continue their assault on the Auditor General. We saw it earlier on the energy file. And this just continues. They continue to draw her expertise into question. They do it constantly with our legislative officers.

Speaker, I've talked about our debt. I've talked about the deficit and the fact that we pay more in interest than we do on post-secondary education, community safety and six other ministries combined. Our interest, our monthly interest, is higher than what we pay on those eight ministries. That's the state of where we are as this government brings this bill and the fall economic statement.

First, a bit of a summary before I get into the 27 acts—I guess mentioning the fact that there are 27 acts should startle people here. This is a mini-budget. This is an omnibus bill. Under the fall economic statement, it deals with occupational health and safety; it deals with the City of Toronto Act; it deals with the Fire Protection and Prevention Act; it talks about how we appoint councillors in some communities under the Municipal Act. This is a great way, Speaker, for this government to bring in this omnibus bill, which means it's a whole collection of things they're trying to do, under the guise of some kind of a fall economic statement.

This bill that we're talking about today has absolutely nothing to do with the fall economic statement. It's the same as the documents that came out today on cap-and-trade, where we learned from the Financial Accountability Officer that the sole purpose of the cap-and-trade is to reduce the deficit now and increase the deficit in future years. We now know that the cap-and-trade cash grab is coming. Gasoline is going to go up 4.3 cents a litre in January. Your home heating fuel is going to go up in January. Speaker, we now know that the cap-and-trade program has absolutely nothing whatsoever to do with greenhouse gases. It's only and exclusively, according to the FAO, a cash grab. It is now going to result in cap-and-trade reducing deficits. That's what this is all about, Speaker. It's all about taking money in before the election, counting it as revenue and then booking the expenses after the election, which will be a more realistic financial picture.

We know there's a trust deficit with this government, and now, without question, we know there's a financial deficit as well, and it's ongoing. If this government keeps on track, that's exactly where we're headed. What the Financial Accountability Officer told us, Speaker, is that each year we get in worse shape than we were the year before.

Again, this bill, with all of the bells and whistles that came with it, is nothing more than a distraction from Ontario's dire fiscal and economic state. As I called it the other day, this is like jingling the keys in front of a baby: "Look over here. Don't look at the mess we've created. Look over here." That's all this is about. It's a series of distractions, and quite frankly, it's embarrassing. It's embarrassing. First of all, it's embarrassing that our financial situation is as dire as it is. It's sad that they don't want to talk about it. They won't acknowledge it. Anybody who tells them how bad it is, including the Auditor General and the Financial Accountability Officer: "They're wrong; we're right." That's all we get from this government, and quite frankly, we've had enough of that. I know the people of Ontario have as well.

The Auditor General refused to sign off on our financial statements. Speaker, that's unprecedented in the history of Ontario. What does that tell this government about the state of their finances, when the Auditor General would not affix her signature to the documents that this government put in front of her?

The FAO again has confirmed that all the Hydro One money and all the cap-and-trade money is only to be used as one-time assets to artificially balance the budget. So I'll go back to one of the sentences the Financial Accountability Officer told us. He told us two things. He said that the only way they're going to achieve this balance is if they raise taxes or continue to cut front-line services.

I can tell you about the cutting of front-line services in my hometown of North Bay. Speaker, I've said it in this Legislature many times. In the last three years, they have fired 350 front-line health care workers, and that includes 100 nurses that they have fired. In my hometown, there have been 350 front-line health care workers, including 100 nurses, who have been fired. That assault on front-line workers, according to the FAO, is going to continue. We can only imagine the breadth and depth of what this government will do.

1620

The Financial Accountability Officer also told us that they're going to raise taxes in order to balance.

The land transfer tax: They will be raising \$105 million from that land transfer tax in 2017-18 and \$110 million in 2018-19.

They're hiking service fees to pay for their waste, mismanagement and scandal. As I said earlier, if you drive a car, you'll pay more. If you go hunting or fishing or camping, you'll pay more. The vehicle and driver registration fees alone have increased by \$503 million in just the last four years.

When you hear this government bring out these rosy, aspirational forecasts, again, you want to believe, but there's nothing that they've told us—I still go back to when I first got here and this government was telling us the gas plant scandal was going to cost \$40 million, and the final two Auditor General reports brought it to \$1.1 billion. So when you hear their rosy forecasts and you hear from the Financial Accountability Officer—he said, "Growth in business investment has been disappointing over the past four years." Can you imagine, Speaker? This is our Financial Accountability Officer. His department, his team of experts, do an analysis of where we are in Ontario, and they've come out and told us that business investment has been disappointing over the past four years.

Speaker, I want to take a moment and talk about an example of what he's talking about. This clearly falls on the fact that we now have the highest electricity rates in North America, plain and simple. Here's an example. When I first got elected and was appointed energy critic, I toured Ontario and had the opportunity to go through Big Becky, the new tunnel, long before it was filled with water. You'll never get into it again for another hundred

years now. It was exciting to learn about Ontario's energy. I toured all of the hydro projects up in the Far North, Darlington, Pickering, wind farms, solar farms, a cattle ranch digester. I mean, I really saw our energy file first-hand. I must tell you, at that time, we were paying 80 cents a kilowatt hour for solar and taking in eight cents. I'm a lifelong entrepreneur. I can do that math. Selling something for eight cents that you're buying for 80 cents—

Interjection.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Yes, it's not going to last long.

So you knew that something was wrong. It didn't take a real expert to figure out that we were going to be in a lot of trouble. Of course, we now know, as we've been saying for five years, there's a crisis.

So I was touring Ontario, and the member from Chatham brought me to visit a greenhouse facility. It was fabulous. They were growing lettuce and tomatoes and peppers. It was a massive operation. The owner said to me, "Vic, I want to double my investment. I want to double the size of this greenhouse. The only problem is, I can't get a power purchase agreement with the province of Ontario that I can live with. My competitors across the border have cheap power, but, Vic, I can't get power at a price that makes sense." This would have been either 2011 or 2012.

About a year ago, there was a vegetable growers' lobby day here at Queen's Park, and I ran into him. I said, "Oh, my gosh, I haven't seen you in years." We exchanged some pleasantries, and I said to him, just more casually, "Did you ever double the size of your greenhouse?" He said to me, "Vic, I want to tell you that I spent \$100 million"—\$100 million—"building a greenhouse and doubling the size of my business."

Mr. Todd Smith: Where?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: He said, "The sad news is I built it in Ohio, across the border, because they have cheap power."

Then he brought me that day down to a buddy of his—a competitor, but they're friends—a similar operation. He said, "Do you remember I brought you to the other greenhouse?" I said, "Yup." He said, "Well, Vic, he spent \$85 million building his new greenhouse."

Mr. Todd Smith: Where?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Pennsylvania. That's where he went, Speaker. In this two-minute story, I'm talking to you not about businesses that left that we read about; this is business that should have come here, where our capital went away. This is business that didn't locate here. I can't even begin to imagine how many businesses there are like that. That's a statistic that is really hard to imagine.

I remember reading about a Rare Earth Minerals company that was poised to locate their smelter in Ontario, but once Xstrata Copper moved their smelter from Timmins 112 kilometres over the border for cheap power, this company, the Rare Earth Minerals company, went to Quebec.

It's funny I'm talking about Quebec, Pennsylvania, Ohio. The interesting point behind all of this is that the

Auditor General has told us that we make more power every day than we consume, mostly because, well, we lost 2,700 businesses the year before last. That's the latest statistic: 2,700 businesses left the province of Ontario. We lost 350,000 manufacturing jobs. We have seen the businesses, like Xstrata Copper—who, by the way, at one time, when they were here in Ontario, were the single largest user of power in all of Ontario.

Mr. Norm Miller: How many jobs?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Six hundred and seventy-two jobs vanished—snap of a finger, vanished, gone to Quebec.

Again, think about this—the irony of this. We make more power than we need because we've put the price of power out of the reach of these companies, and they've left Ontario. They've left Ontario. They're gone. We don't use all the power we used to, so we now pay Quebec and the States to take that surplus power. The Auditor General told us we've paid Quebec and Ohio \$3.6 billion to take that surplus power. That's from the Auditor General.

Imagine the irony now. We pay Ohio every night to take some power from us. We pay Pennsylvania. We pay Michigan. We pay New York. We pay Quebec to take that surplus power. We pay them about 1.8 cents—approximately two cents is what the bottom line is; let's call it two cents just for round numbers—to take that power, and they come and knock on the doors of our businesses, like Xstrata Copper in Timmins and like the two greenhouse examples that I gave you around the Chatham area, and they've moved away. They've moved because those provinces and states have cheap power. Well, of course they have cheap power. We paid them to take our power. They've got all this power now that was at a negative price. It was below zero. Even if they only charged two cents, they still make four cents for nothing—nothing. And they gutted our jobs.

That's why this government continues to sit here and spin, spin, spin, spin: “What we're doing with hydro, our numbers are so good.” They're not, Speaker. I've gone through these numbers. Our exports are down. We're not the number one jurisdiction in mining anymore; we've fallen to number 16.

We are the largest subnational debtor on the planet. We're not a country; we're a province, so we're subnational. We're compared to a state in the US and other states throughout the world where you're not a nation. We are a subnational, but we are the largest subnational debtor in the world. That's not a bragging right. We don't hear the government talk about those things. They talk about all the aspirations they have—but no plan to get there.

1630

You have the Financial Accountability Officer saying, “Growth in business investment has been disappointing over the past four years.” Well, of course it is, when you've got the highest electricity rates in North America, when you've got the highest taxes. We've raised taxes by more than 20% in just the last five years. How can you be the largest subnational debtor and have the highest taxes

at the same time? It's because they don't have a revenue problem; they have a spending problem.

Exports and foreign direct investment—all declining. We are on a downhill slide. They don't want to admit that, they certainly don't want to talk about it, but I've got to tell you, Speaker, what I really do not like hearing is them telling us something that's the complete opposite of that. It is just disingenuous to hear that kind of discussion when it's not accurate and is absolutely opposite from the reality. I'm tempted to say lots of words here, Speaker, but parliamentary decorum stops me from using the kind of language I really want to use. They're not telling us the facts. They're telling us the opposite of the facts.

When we look at the individual items of the fall economic statement—again, some of it is very technical in nature, but they have really gone in and done some very interesting things to 27 acts which have nothing to do with the fall economic statement. Here's one, the Municipal Act: new requirements mandating the head of council of every regional municipality—except for Oxford county, because it falls under a different category—to be directly elected by the voters, beginning with the 2018 municipal election, and remove the power of those regional municipalities to change to an appointed head of council. We're dealing with the Municipal Act in a whole other bill right now—

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Same day.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: —on the same day, within the same short period of hours, almost minutes, to be frank, yet they've buried it in here. They have created an omnibus bill. They have created a mini budget. They have put together a package that has absolutely nothing to do with the fall economic statement.

It's like jingling the keys in front of the baby as a distraction. They do not want us to stand here, as I have done for the last almost hour, talking about the dire financial straits that this government, and this government alone, has put us in. They have put us in this by their own policies—ill-directed, misdirected policies. They have put us in the dire straits that we're in. They don't want to talk about that so they stuff this thing with 27 acts, including how to elect a head of council.

It is unbelievable that this is what we have. That belonged in the Municipal Act that's being dealt with at the exact same time by a whole separate committee. This is to distract you from the sentences that the FAO, the Financial Accountability Officer, gave us, that business investment is disappointing. It's to distract us from the statistics, quite frankly, that they don't want us to talk about. The minister himself characterized our economy as in “slow growth.” It was one of those rare days when he actually fessed up with some statistics. The FAO told us that each percentage point we decline costs us almost \$1 billion.

But in the last few seconds I have, I just want to remind the Legislature of the one sentence that we got from an internal Ministry of Finance document: “There are fewer jobs today relative to the population than before

the recession.” It goes on to say, “In other words, employment growth has not kept up with the growth of the working-age population.” So while we don’t believe a word that the government tells us, we believe the Financial Accountability Officer, the Auditor General and the documents that we got from the ministry through freedom of information, documents they did not want us to hear.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Wayne Gates: I’m just going to start by saying section 17 of Bill 70 is an attack on the skilled trades and should be fixed.

But I can’t sit here in good conscience and listen to an hour of this going on without at least—if you’re talking about trust, let’s get the trust out there. Hydro One: It was a Conservative position under Mike Harris to sell 100%. He privatized it. It was only stopped when the unions took the issue on, particularly CUPE.

Mr. Todd Smith: Oh, come on. That was a hundred years ago.

Mr. Wayne Gates: If you’re not believing that—because the Conservatives are heckling me over here—that’s the truth. Go look it up.

Then Tim Hudak put a white paper together, which the member signed off on, where it was clear that they wanted to sell 100% of Hydro One. Some of the PC MPPs sitting here today, a lot of them, were there when they did the white paper on selling off Hydro One.

The Liberals have sold 30%; they’re looking to sell 60%. That’s a mistake. You shouldn’t sell one more bit of Hydro One. The only party that has said not to sell Hydro One is the NDP. We’ve been very consistent on that. So I wanted to get that out. I think that’s important.

I can’t sit here and listen to him talk about manufacturing either. I was at the bargaining table with General Motors when we were going almost bankrupt. Do you know who said, “Let them die”? The PC Party, which would have meant we lost thousands and thousands and thousands of jobs. It would have meant that our retirees would have lost their benefits immediately. It would have meant workers that worked with plastic, that worked in steel, that worked in the parts industry—small businesses would have gone under.

So when you stand up and talk about manufacturing, at least stand up and say, “It was a mistake that we supported that position.” It was wrong then, and it’s wrong today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Etobicoke Centre.

Mr. Yvan Baker: To me, it’s really disappointing to hear the fearmongering and the talking down of Ontario from the PC member opposite, and the selective use of facts to spin, really, people into believing something that isn’t true.

There are a number of things the member said. First of all, he talks about artificially balancing the budget. Don’t fear-monger. You’ll watch it happen, and it will happen.

We’ve committed to balancing the budget and that’s what we’re going to do.

The second thing he talked about—let me just talk about a few facts, because he talked about facts. I’ll share some actual facts. Net debt to GDP is forecast to peak at about 40% and decline. What the opposition does not understand, and the proof is in the numbers, is that the interest as a share of our expenses under the NDP was 12%, under the PCs was 14%, and our 2015-16 forecast is 8.9%. He’s talking about interest under our management, yet he’s not willing to look himself in the mirror.

We borrowed \$30 billion less than our original forecast due to responsible fiscal management. Moody’s upgraded our credit rating to stable. This reflects confidence in our government’s plan to grow the economy and create jobs.

He talks a lot about Ontario’s subnational debt. A subnational comparison of net debt across countries is really like comparing apples to oranges.

Interjection.

Mr. Yvan Baker: If the member opposite listened, he’d understand.

Provinces have more budgetary responsibilities than states. US states are not responsible to the same extent as provinces for health care, for example. Ontario’s budget is bigger than California’s, despite having about one third of the population. It stands to reason that a province would have a greater debt load than a state. Comparing those two things is apples to oranges. It’s spin, and it’s misleading the people of Ontario. I’d urge the member opposite not to do it.

The last thing I will say is that the FAO clearly stated today that the report does not “forecast cap-and-trade revenues, expenses, or cash flows.” It also doesn’t “analyze potential economic feedback from the impacts of cap-and-trade on the economy to the province’s revenues.” So for him to project forward like that without taking those into consideration—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you.

Mr. Yvan Baker: He’s not—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. When I say “thank you,” it’s time to sit down.

Mr. Yvan Baker: I sat down.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Yes, after the second “thank you.”

The member from Prince Edward–Hastings.

Mr. Todd Smith: Listening to the Liberals and their talking points is enough to drive you to drink. Although under this bill, it’s going to cost you even more to do that because they’re jacking up taxes on local craft distillers in Ontario. I know it’s something that the member from Nipissing didn’t get to because he had a lot of information about how big the debt of the province is getting and how much we’re wasting in interest in Ontario because the Liberal Party can’t manage a budget. However, Ontario craft distillers are going to see an increase of 61.5%. These are small distilleries in our communities that are trying to compete. That tax is actually 10 times more than the taxes being required on a bottle of Ontario wine or

craft beer. Do you know what this is doing, Mr. Speaker? The fact that they're increasing the taxes on Ontario craft distillers by 61.5% is sending a chill across everyone who produces in Ontario. Those who are producing wine are saying, "Holy smokes, what's going to happen? Am I next?" Those who are producing craft beer are saying, "Wow, am I the next one that's going to get hit with this whopping tax?"

1640

What we need is a graduated taxation system for producers and distillers to grow. We should be wanting to create jobs in this sector. This is a grain-to-glass type of productivity that we should be promoting in Ontario—

Mrs. Cristina Martins: We are.

Mr. Todd Smith: —but we're not. We're driving jobs out of this province. Whether it's because of the soaring electricity or the increased red tape—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Stop the clock. It's the second time I've asked the member from Davenport—I try to do it off the record to ask her to be quiet, and she keeps doing it. Now I have to centre you out. Thank you.

Continue.

Mr. Todd Smith: I know they hate to hear it, but jobs are going to Ohio, as the member said. They're going to Pennsylvania. They're going to Quebec, and jobs won't be created in Ontario because of this government's track record.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from London West.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Thank you very much, Speaker. I am pleased to rise on behalf of my constituents to offer some very brief thoughts about Bill 70.

I first wanted to comment that the title of the bill is rather ironic in many ways. It's called Building Ontario Up for Everyone Act (Budget Measures), 2016. In fact, there is very little in this bill that builds Ontario up for anyone, and so calling the act with that name is rather ironic from my perspective.

The other issue—and this was pointed out by the member for Nipissing—is that the package of schedules that are put together in this bill really have very little to do with the fall economic statement. This is an omnibus bill. It includes 26 schedules that amend many different statutes in the province of Ontario. One of the consequences of an omnibus bill is that it allows the government to package together amendments, some that are consequential, many are insignificant—but it buries some of the fundamental changes that could be very concerning and alarming for people in this province.

In particular, I want to point out schedules 16 and 17. Schedule 16 amends the Occupational Health and Safety Act and has very, very serious potential consequences for worker health and safety in this province. Schedule 17 amends the Ontario College of Trades and Apprenticeship Act, and that also has quite a substantive impact on the way we perform work in this province. These should be taken out and introduced as separate legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Nipissing, two minutes.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I would like to begin by acknowledging the comments made by the members from Niagara Falls, Etobicoke Centre, Prince Edward-Hastings and London West. I appreciate their input on this important issue.

Speaker, we hear again from the government the spin that they try to bring to this. But ignore all of that and go to the officers who have the team of experts who put this information together. These are the independent officers. This is the Auditor General and her team. This is the Financial Accountability Officer and his team. This is a team of accountants and financial experts. What they said to us in the latest report: "The FAO indicated that the government would be unable to achieve a balanced budget as promised in 2017-18 and would instead have a deficit of \$2.6 billion."

The report goes on to say, "Ontario's budget would be expected to remain in deficit over the next five years." That's a fact. You cannot run from the facts. Yes, we love the wonderful world that they painted, but Maclean's Magazine called it either fantasy land or pixie dust last year; I can't remember which of the two they called it. That's the reality.

They really cannot dispute their own Ministry of Finance document when it revealed, "There are fewer jobs today relative to the population than before the recession." It goes on to say, "In other words, employment growth has not kept up with the growth of the working-age population." That is completely opposite from what they say publicly.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It is a pleasure to be back in the House in the afternoon rounds. I've been in Bill 2 committee now for several weeks; it feels like several years, I must tell you. So I'm happy to be back debating a piece of legislation.

The Building Ontario Up for Everyone Act (Budget Measures): Last week, the finance minister was quite vocal about how amazing this piece of legislation would be for homeowners in the province of Ontario, to make it more affordable for those homeowners. I think very shortly after that, the Premier sort of went into damage control and said, "Listen, don't get your hopes up." Boy, she was right. I get to say something positive, actually, in that regard.

I do want to say before we begin that the main schedules I will be focusing on are 16 and 17 because they fundamentally undermine worker safety in the province of Ontario in a very substantive way. I will be going through various legal opinions, research and evidence to show how wrong this government is. In fact, it is becoming almost a real challenge to stand up in the House on a regular basis and point out the weaknesses that this government has in how they craft the laws of this province, especially when they leave the interests of workers and citizens on the back burner and their own interests right up in the front.

Before I begin, I want to thank Cindy Forster, the MPP for Welland, who is the labour critic. Her office has been incredibly helpful to me in this regard. Our entire research staff have been combing through this piece of legislation because it is an omnibus bill. This is the same government that used to criticize the Stephen Harper government and say that omnibus bills were fundamentally undemocratic. You'll remember that, Mr. Speaker. This government was very critical of the Harper government and how they would layer and build in these little loopholes into a piece of legislation. Unfortunately, Bill 70 is all that and a little bit more. This was not a stretch goal for this Premier. Schedules 16 and 17, in particular, are quite damaging.

But I'm going to start by saying that as New Democrats, we filed a reasoned amendment on Bill 70. We asked that schedules 16 and 17 be removed. If this government was truly concerned about the welfare of the workers who actually are responsible for building Ontario up, they would have removed and accepted this reasoned amendment.

Essentially, what we were arguing was that substantial labour amendments—with the issue of worker safety—should not be part of a finance bill, fundamentally. We asked that schedules 16 and 17 of Bill 70 be deleted and that each of the said schedules be introduced as separate public bills. This government should have accepted that. That they're burying these two schedules in Bill 70 is actually—in some respects, it's unprecedented, especially that these schedules go so far.

I am going to be addressing who this bill leaves out, actually, because the government has been talking about inclusion and about enabling, and this bill does not do that.

1650

You'll remember that the first iteration of Building Ontario Up came after 2014 as part of a budget measures act. After the prorogation, a light went on and they remembered to put "Building Ontario Up for Everyone." They recognized that they're actually supposed to be here for everyone. But what's interesting is that throughout this legislation, the bill sets up a regulatory framework instead of including the changes in the bill, so that promise of openness and transparency is also not contained within this bill.

I'm going to start with schedule 2. Schedule 2 amends the alcohol and gaming regulations. It does a couple of things. When we had my briefing—and I want to thank the staff who showed up to do that. It's a very complex bill and it took a long time. These are clearly people who care deeply about the work that they're doing, and I think we have to acknowledge that being a public servant is an honourable profession. That said, they were not able to answer some substantive questions that we had in this briefing.

The Alcohol and Gaming Regulation and Public Protection Act addresses the tax rate on Ontario wine or wine coolers purchased in the shopping area of an authorized grocery store, or from a manufacturer operating a

boutique. The tax will increase from 6.1% to 11.1%. The rationale for this was that because these boutique operators are now contained within a grocery store, they don't have the overhead costs of having a cashier, so as a reward their taxes are now going up from 6.1% to 11.1%.

However, the main contentious piece in this, which I think caught Ontario craft distillers off guard entirely, is that spirits purchased from a distillery retail store will be taxed at 61.5% of the retail price, plus a 28%-to-38% litre volume tax and an 8.93-cent environment tax for each non-refillable container.

It's really interesting, because we've heard how important listening is to this government. There are lots of conversations going on, and there's lots of talk about the discourse and reaching out to the real people of this province. Well, the Ontario craft distillers had been reaching out to this government for quite some time, because they really wanted to follow this pattern that the Ontario Craft Brewers had, which was very successful after we got some of the taxation rates correct.

I think that the blindside experience that the Ontario craft distillers had with this particular piece of legislation is really almost unprecedented, because they had been in conversations with the government. There are two letters that they had written on May 16, 2016, and July 19, 2016, really working to try to work with this government, to usher in the same renaissance in distilling as seen in other jurisdictions where similar taxation measures have been adopted.

Their ask was to introduce legislation to replace the current markup and commission structure at on-site distillery retail stores with a tax on purchases of spirits. So they were working with the government—well, they thought they were working with this government, and they thought the government was listening. However, the press release that was issued following the fall economic statement reads as follows: "Ontario's New Dispiriting Distillery Tax Deals Major Blow to Home Grown Small Batch Spirits; Future of Grain to Glass Distilling in Doubt."

This, for us, demonstrates how wrong a government can get a policy when you don't truly listen, when you don't engage the people who have the real lived experience of trying to start a small business in the province of Ontario. It truly is a disconnect with the reality of businesses in the province of Ontario.

This press release—this is dated November 18, so immediately after the fall economic statement—goes on to say: "The Ontario Craft Distillers Association (OCDA) is calling on our elected representatives to reconsider the Wynne Government's newly introduced distillery tax. On Wednesday, Finance Minister Charles Sousa introduced Bill 70, which includes a new 61.5% sales tax for stores owned and operated by Ontario's small and independent distilleries. This tax is a major blow to the sustainability of distilleries working to provide Ontario farm-to-table, grain-to-glass spirits, and ignores the lessons of what works and what doesn't from Ontario's own wine and beer tax policy, as well as the successful spirits tax policies in places like British Columbia."

This is a direct quote from the co-founder of the Yongehurst Distillery right here in Toronto: “We were expecting a spirit tax tiered by volume”—which works, Mr. Speaker. “This bill demonstrates that the Liberal government doesn’t support the growth of small businesses or a healthy and competitive domestic market. It’s disappointing for all of the Ontario businesses within our ecosystem that could have grown the economy organically to create long-term jobs and prosperity in every corner of the province.” And: “We were hoping for much more, there’s so much potential here.”

Now, it’s interesting to see where these Ontario craft distillers are. They’re everywhere from Beamsville to Guelph, Stratford, Johnstown, Elmira, Ottawa, St. Catharines, Hearst, Ayr, Concord, Bloomfield, Perth, Toronto, Niagara and Amherstburg. The important piece of this conversation is that we’ve had a government that has been talking about advanced manufacturing around food processing, around partnering with the farmers in the province of Ontario, around commercializing the research that we’ve invested in to create good jobs and to bring the grains that this province is so famous for to a marketable area to create jobs. In fact, Kitchener–Waterloo was also on a potential list as well.

The Ontario Craft Distillers go on to say that “taxing by litre means that an expensive-to-brew barrel-aged barley wine is taxed at the same rate as a straightforward lager. Products with high labour and ingredient costs aren’t discriminated against with a by-the-litre tax. Graduated taxation is necessary....” It is necessary, and this government knows that it is necessary.

It is interesting to see such blindness—wilful blindness, I’m not sure. But we have, obviously, received some feedback from people across the province on the particular issue of craft distillers. I received one from Matt Duimering. He goes on to say:

“Bill 70 is the government robbing businesses of their money. Especially small distilleries located around Ontario. Many of these distilleries’ primary income is via their storefronts. These distilleries employ local staff and suppliers. For example, Toronto Distillery Co. TDC only uses locally grown ingredients and a local mill to grind their grains for making their grain-based spirits.

“Small craft distilleries are dedicated to quality and creativity.”

This is one of the areas that the government has included in their own four pillars of building up Ontario, supporting small and medium-sized businesses, and yet they’ve introduced a measure in the first schedule of Bill 70 which will essentially make expanding, growing or maintaining these small craft brewers impossible.

Matt goes on to say, “It absolutely sickens and disgusts me that my government is trying to roll out this bill. Many jobs will be lost and dreams crushed.”

Corporate, large-scale Canadian distilleries and imported spirits are doing well in the province of Ontario. Why would this government specifically target the small and medium-sized distillers?

One person wrote in to the member from Parkdale–High Park. Her name is Daisy McCabe-Lokos. She goes

on to say: “What a shame the provincial government doesn’t recognize the value in hard-working small business people who are doing great things for Ontario and our reputation as a province.... What is the justification?”

Another one—because there are three small distillers, I think, in Parkdale–High Park, and these people are now completely and utterly destabilized by this schedule. This is from Sunny Purewal. Sunny writes, “The Ontario government has introduced Bill 70, which contains a section (schedule 1, section 29) which calls for a 61.5% sales tax on liquor.... Taxing spirits on the basis of retail price is unfair to small distillers because they do not benefit from the cost savings of manufacturing at scale.”

1700

So you can’t impose such a high tax and think that this sector is going to be resilient enough to manage it.

Finally—and this email went to the members from Cambridge and Kitchener Centre and Kitchener–Conestoga. This came from a local company that was hoping to start up a distillery in the Waterloo region. They write:

“My group and I are very confused. We are in the process (including having the investors in place and equipment ready to order) of setting up a craft distillery. We are in the process of negotiating lease locations in the KW–Cambridge (Hespeler) area.

“We have an excellent business plan. BDC is working with us. As I say, we have money committed.” They say they have a business plan that has growth opportunities for businesses in the local area.

“Now, in the last few days, with the introduction of Bill 70, and a sales tax of 61.5% on out-of-shop sales, our plans have come to a crashing halt. There is no way a craft distillery can be feasible” with that tax rate.

“A very promising new local business has been shut down!”

Do you think that this province can afford to lose any more jobs? Absolutely not. They require an answer, an informed answer. They asked an honest question, and this is the question that I will leave with you:

“If this is meant to shut down craft distilleries, then say so, so that we can conclude our plans and send investment back to our investors and tell them the Ontario government has made a conscious decision that Ontario does not want to see craft distilleries.

“If this result was unintended, then tell us this, and we need to know if the government is willing to work through this and bring back the proposals under Raise a Glass as they relate to craft distilleries.”

It goes on—you can see that it’s an emotional email because this is somebody’s dream. This is a way for our economy to have some strength and connection to the agricultural sector. He goes on to say:

“My group demands a well-thought-out answer. I await your reply. We have people in training for good jobs in our company, properties that we will have to pull back from, equipment orders that are now on hold and investors to explain this to.

"This certainly seems to be a total reversal aimed at destroying a budding industry."

You can see, Mr. Speaker, that this tax is very anti-small business. The distillery association has been asking for a graduated tax, and this government completely rejected that out of hand. This does not make sense. It doesn't. This is a finance bill. It should have a taxation structure that is supportive of small and medium-sized businesses and that recognizes that this connection with the agricultural industry has to move forward.

There are two other schedules before I get to 16 and 17. Schedule 13 was the land transfer tax. I just want to congratulate OREA for working so hard to get a rebate for homeowners and lifting up the price of that house to \$368,000. They worked for years to have some acknowledgment that the land transfer tax was very problematic for first-time homebuyers. It really was, though, the big story that wasn't so big at the end of the day. You'll be hard pressed to find a house in the city of Toronto or the GTA where this rebate would be applicable to you.

At the same time—and we tried to pivot this because we are always trying to bring the voices of the people of this province to this Legislature—the affordable housing piece is still out there. If you are serious about building Ontario up for everyone, you need an affordable housing strategy which puts people into sustainable, reliable shelter, which actually contributes to the overall health of the province.

We even heard in our budget committee delegations last year—and it will stay with me for a long time—that there are 60% of the children in Hamilton who are transient because their housing is precarious. If you have precarious housing, it affects the education system, it affects the health care system and it definitely affects the economy. That's the difference with us as New Democrats: When we talk about the economy, we talk about housing, about health care, around education, because it's all connected—so very disappointing.

Of course, it was significant, I think, particularly for this Premier, who wants to be known as the social justice Premier, that on the same day that this act was announced, that the fall economic statement was put out, Toronto was declared the child poverty capital of Canada. If you think that housing is not part of ending child poverty—we're not going to address child poverty until we address adult poverty, and precarious housing is part of that.

So that's what I'm going to say about that—with congratulations to OREA. There's a lot of work to do on the real estate file. The Financial Accountability Officer listed housing prices as a risk to the overall economy. So if people stop buying homes, if the dream of home ownership dies, then that's a strong indicator that the economy is not as resilient as the press releases are reading. We have to be very clear about that, Mr. Speaker.

Schedule 18, the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan Legislation Repeal Act, 2016—finally, the act is repealed. It proposes to dissolve the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan. It is so ironic that the day this act came out

was also the same day that CBC revealed that when the Liberals announced that the ORPP was done, that their work had been so successful, that they had made sure the Liberal government at the federal level was going to do what they said they were going to do—that's a full-time job in and of itself, I have to say. The same day that happened, CBC also reported that even after the ORPP was cancelled, this government spent \$793,000 on more commercials. Do you know what we could do with \$793,000 in Waterloo region, in the not-for-profit sector? We spent half a year with Hockey Helps the Homeless raising \$150,000 to keep at-risk youth and seniors off the streets. So that was, I think, fairly symbolic.

I'm going to dedicate most of the time to schedules 16 and 17. Schedule 16 genuinely caught a lot of people in this province off guard. Schedule 16 amends the Occupational Health and Safety Act to allow the Chief Prevention Officer to accredit a health and safety management system, according to the standards set out by the CPO. I want to talk to you about why this is so important. I'm going to give you a quick overview, Mr. Speaker.

Schedule 16 makes a significant and consequential and regressive change to the Occupational Health and Safety Act, the OSHA. Opposed by allied injured worker groups, it would create a system of health and safety so-called accreditation for employers that would remove these employers from being subject to mandatory health and safety inspections. Under the change, the Chief Prevention Officer, the CPO, may establish standards that a health and safety management system must meet in order to become an accredited health and safety management system, the details of which are left to regulation. This is a major problem: that so much of this schedule, in particular, is left to regulation.

It also provides that the Chief Prevention Officer establish standards and access records from employers wishing to participate, subject to provisions of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. Why is this so important? You might not know this, Mr. Speaker, but in our overview with ministry staff and the briefing, ministry staff had said that nothing in the schedule removes the burden, in some employers' view, of mandatory inspections. However, labour and injured workers' advocates shared the contents of an email that they received from the same ministry staff that described the plan changes this way—so this is coming from the ministry:

"Businesses who set up a superior example when it comes to health and safety standards and compliance should be rewarded for their efforts, while others should be incentivized to follow their example. This program would recognize employers who implement superior occupational health and safety management systems, highlighting the great work that they are doing to protect Ontario workers and reduce the burden of unnecessary processes such as routine inspections. We would still investigate complaints and incidents."

1710

So there are several people who are leaders, really, on worker safety, evidence-based researchers who under-

stand this field incredibly well. One likens the change to what exists under the experience rating program now, widely condemned by labour and injured workers as leading to loss-time injury (LTI) claims suppression by employers who have been incented to apply pressure to employees to return to work quickly after an accident or injury regardless of whether the worker is ready because under the program employers with low LTI are awarded rebates—sometimes in the tens of thousands each year—while employers with poor records are effectively fined. This has led to a well-documented situation where injured workers not ready to return go back to work for fear of reprisals.

This is a very real issue in the province of Ontario.

Obviously, as I mentioned, most of these changes planned here beg further scrutiny, pointing out that the details are left to regulation and openly wondering—and this is the outstanding question on schedule 16: When is a routine inspection an “unnecessary process,” and what other “unnecessary processes” are they referring to?

Ministry staff, while they did their best in our briefing, did not address some of the outstanding questions: Who would develop accreditation standards? Why does ministry staff characterize routine inspections as a “burden” and an “unnecessary process”? What are the current resources being devoted now by the CPO to these inspections? What would be the cost of setting up and administering this new accreditation process versus the cost of continuing routine inspections? Why is the ministry establishing a regime where only at the point of injury or worse can one complain about health and safety standards?

We all know, in this place—and I’m sure the member from Muskoka knows as well—that the smart money on worker safety is on the prevention piece. It’s on the education piece. It isn’t picking up the pieces of your life after, or worse.

This would beg the question: How well are we doing, actually, in the province of Ontario? Well, one only has to look at the ministry guidelines. This entire movement is going to give outstanding powers to the Chief Prevention Officer, so let’s look and see how well we are doing in the province of Ontario.

From the 2014-15 annual report: “From 2005 to 2014, there was no substantial increase or decrease in fatality rates and critical injuries.” We’ve made no progress. Things aren’t getting worse, but they’re not getting better. So what have we decided to do? We’ve decided to give the Office of the Chief Prevention Officer more powers to—what? Maintain the status quo, or, as the informed voices of labour have pointed out, actually give power in all the wrong places at the end of the cycle, after workers are injured?

The OFL has been very forthright with us, and I’m sure with the government as well. “These proposed amendments go far beyond just giving the government the power to create an accreditation process. Section 7.7 gives the Chief Prevention Officer the power to outsource....”

We have serious, serious concerns about giving the CPO these powers. He can outsource virtually the entire accreditation recognition process. He can outsource the training program approval. He can outsource deciding who is an approved training provider. He can outsource the certification of the JHSC members. He can outsource the collection of information about workers who have been trained.

This opens the door for the privatization of workplace health and safety; make no mistake about it. It’s all in the regulations, all outside the scrutiny of the people of this province and all without consultation with the very people we rely on to build Ontario up.

Now this government has accelerated, in an aggressive manner, the privatization agenda on almost every front. On health care for certain, the Auditor General said that 30% of the funding that goes to CCACs goes to administration, bureaucracy and profit. We have seen the energy file really be compromised in such a strategic way by putting the private interests of corporations and businesses ahead of the very people whom any government, and particularly this government, is elected to serve.

There have been some mea culpa statements that have happened of late. I read with interest today some of the comments and reflections on what that mea culpa looks like, especially with regard to the privatization of energy, because if they can privatize and compromise the economy of future generations going forward on the energy file, they certainly can do it on occupational health and safety, and they certainly can do it on the health care file as well. It’s actually happening in our colleges and universities, with the outsourcing of key services as well.

This op-ed caught my attention today. It’s from Robyn Urback. It was from CBC this morning. It’s an opinion piece, but it truly reflects the privatization movement, if you will, and the negative impact that privatization has on people of this province. The title is, “Aside from the Incessant Warnings, Ontario’s Hydro Crisis Clearly Came Out of Nowhere.” She goes on to say, “Aside from the repeated, incessant warnings—there was no warning.” This is a very sarcastic piece, I’d have to say at the outset.

“Ontario’s energy costs have spiralled out of control. Consumers are struggling to pay their hydro bills and still have enough money left to buy a ticket to one of the Premier’s cash-for-access fundraisers.

“Who—with the exception of everyone—could have foreseen that wasting billions of dollars on cancelled gas plants, paying way above market value for green energy contracts, producing too much energy and selling it to other jurisdictions at a loss, and investing in smart meters that didn’t actually do what they were supposed to do would translate into skyrocketing electricity bills for everyday Ontarians?...”

“Now Ontario finds itself in a mess of its own making, locked in unsustainable contracts and a looming cap-and-trade scheme that will make hydro bills even more expensive, all while some Ontario families have ‘had to choose between paying the electricity bill and buying food...’”

In the weeks and months ahead, the Premier has said that she's going to look at ways to lower rates, but this government "didn't seem to realize its mistake until it finally took a look at the numbers—not in the province's energy file, of course, but in a Mainstreet/Postmedia poll released earlier this month on the Premier's approval ratings."

That is what drove this particular Premier to recognize that the high, skyrocketing hydro rates are truly hurting the people of this province, but there hasn't been a recognition on the part of this government that incorporating profits into private companies' contracts on renewable energy, to date, has cost the people of this province \$37 billion more. That number keeps me up at night. It's such a huge number. It's almost unfathomable how we are going to get out from under those 25-year contracts.

Robyn goes on to say, and this is my point on this: "Just one week ago in the government's fall fiscal update, the Liberals announced triumphantly, 'Our plan is working.'" It's like the emperor has no clothes—you remember that fairy tale, Mr. Speaker. There's a mea culpa on a Saturday, and on Thursday they declare the plan is working.

"Indeed, besides the dozens of reports, years of increasing consumer prices, dire financial warnings and protests over unaffordable hydro bills—there was no way" that anyone "could have seen this coming." That's a nice satirical piece just to break up the one-hour lead on this piece of legislation.

1720

Back to schedule 16: There was this promise that this government was going to be different. There was this promise that they were going to consult. There was this promise of leading from the activist centre and truly incorporating the voices of the people of this province. Yet on schedule 16, on the skilled trades in the province of Ontario, you have a piece of legislation which will undermine safety, which opens the door to privatization. Honestly, at the end of the day, this burden of having workplace inspections—imagine calling a basic evidence-based practice of protecting workers in the province a burden. Imagine the arrogance that takes, especially when we have seen no improvement on worker safety in the province of Ontario since 2005. It is absolutely, completely shocking.

I'd like to remind the government that routine workplace inspections are not a burden when the workplace is safe. That is the goal. The goal is to have safer workplaces. We have all seen the victims of workplace accidents; sometimes their parents come to this place. We have all pledged, we have all promised—in fact, we took an oath when we became elected officials to put the needs of the people that we serve above private interests.

For me, I always think of Nick Lalonde. Nick Lalonde was 22 years old. He was working on a high-rise apartment in Waterloo. He had a harness on. He was not strapped in. He had no working-at-heights training. What I had to do, as a member for two years—you'll remember

this, Mr. Speaker—was continue to raise his name, because he fell from that building at 22 years of age. He was a young father. His entire family feels the pain of not having that working-at-heights training each and every day. Every time I go by that building I think of him.

Now, after following the Dean report and asking the questions, finally the Chief Prevention Officer developed mandatory workplace working-at-heights training, which my own son completed last summer before starting his apprenticeship as an electrician. But it cost \$230. How many families, especially in the child poverty capital right here in Toronto, have \$230 to have their child trained before going to work on a roof or in a plant? How engaged are those students in knowing their rights as workers in the province of Ontario?

Will schedule 16, by expanding these powers to the Chief Prevention Officer, make workplaces safer in the province of Ontario? It will not. Uncategorically, it will not, and we are going to fight it. That's why we wanted it pulled out of this piece of legislation.

Moving on, though, because I have to move on a little bit, to finalize on schedule 16 around occupational health and safety: "The research is clear. Government inspections are valuable to protecting worker health and safety. But the value of management systems with which the Liberals want to replace inspections is totally unproven. More like self-interested wishful thinking." This came from an individual, an activist for injured workers who really wants to inform policy in this place going forward.

Consultation after the fact is never effective consultation, but we will push this government to honour that commitment that they made to the OFL, to OPSEU and to the skilled trade workers in the province of Ontario, quite honestly.

Moving on to schedule 17, which really just doubles down on undermining worker safety in the province of Ontario: Schedule 17 amends the Ontario College of Trades and Apprenticeship Act, 2009, to give the minister the power to determine the classification of a trade, which was formerly the college's responsibility.

The concerns on this particular file are too—the list of concerns would take me well past an hour, but I do want to get some of them on the record.

It will dramatically alter the way that the College of Trades functions today. Namely, it will open up re-classifications of scope of trades, including what shall be considered compulsory or voluntary—skills and standards for skilled trades—as well as setting the ratios, like how many apprentices to journeymen, for instance. These changes are going to be facilitated by the appointments council.

I want to thank the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers for reaching out and sharing their evidence-based concerns, as well as a legal opinion they have sought, on the efficacy of the changes to the Ontario College of Trades. Just as an overview, in the legal opinion they provided on the amendments, they've said that they will "devalue skilled trades and put the public at risk by allowing unskilled workers to do the work of a

compulsory trade.... Bottom line is big business will benefit from cheap labour costs and the public and workers will be at risk.”

Essentially, what the government is trying to do is say that if a piece of work is being done by a labourer that falls under the scope of practice of a skilled trade, it may now be allowed if the Ontario Labour Relations Board decides that work in isolation might not be dangerous. So it's very subjective.

“Segmenting out pieces of a trade will open the door to more and more work being done by unskilled workers who don't realize the risks. If the government thought that the scopes were too broad, then let the college go about its work to update the scopes instead of creating a Wild West that lets corporations benefit from” paying low wages for labour.

I have to tell you, Mr. Speaker, it is hard not to think of my own son in this instance, who is just starting his apprenticeship career. Once they realize what this government is up to, every parent with a child who is going to be entering the trades—and we need more skilled trade workers in the province of Ontario—every parent will be on that front lawn of Queen's Park fighting for a clear, safe method of ensuring that people have the appropriate training.

This is also a consumer protection issue. It's also an underground economy issue. The more people you have working in the underground economy without the appropriate qualifications, the more it increases the chance of something going wrong—something going wrong for the homeowner, something going wrong for the worker and something going wrong for the consumer.

The other piece about schedule 17 is that it strikes out the current definitions of “compulsory trade” and “voluntary change” in section 1 of the Ontario College of Trades Act and substitutes “minister's regulation,” once again giving outstanding powers to a minister. Schedule 16 gives outstanding powers to the Chief Prevention Officer, but the decisions of the board on reclassifications, ratios, compliance and enforcement will be “final and binding.”

Well, how very democratic of you. You put it right in the schedule that there is no appeal to what would be compulsory and what would be voluntary.

Just as an example, when asked, the ministry staff acknowledged that as drafted, the new powers of the panel regulating the college could conceivably result in a member of the college, perhaps the home builders' association, an employers' group, applying to have non-certified workers on a construction site certified as framers—though “they wouldn't do that.” No, of course not. So this is the “trust us” clause. That same scenario was floated where perhaps a labour group could also be involved in this.

This is a substantive schedule which moves the College of Trades and the mandate of the College of Trades away from worker safety. It caused such concern for IBEW, with very good reason, that they sought a legal opinion. I'm going to give you a quick overview about what the legal opinion stated.

1730

It says, “The government has chosen a drastic method, in terms of both legislative process and substantive result, to weaken the public protection mandate of the College of Trades beyond recognition. Schedule 17 of Bill 70 will essentially reverse or neuter the regulation of the trades just a few years after the need for regulation was first recognized and implemented.”

It says, “In terms of process”—and this is important, Mr. Speaker, because this speaks to the work we are supposed to be doing in this place around the creation of legislation which meets the needs of the people of this province. It says:

“In terms of process,

“(1) The government has hidden the proposed amendments from public scrutiny by attaching them as schedule 17 to an omnibus budget bill;

“(2) The bill does not say it is modifying ss. 2 and 4 of the College of Trades and Apprenticeship Act ... which purport to protect public safety by restricting the work of compulsory trades to skilled tradesmen, yet it proposes several other new legislative provisions that override those sections....” Again, how very open and how very transparent of this government.

“(3) Most prominently, the bill contradicts basic principles of constitutional law by giving an administrative tribunal—the Ontario Labour Relations Board ... —the authority to overrule provisions of the legislation. This practice has been disparaged for the last 100 years by courts and commentators....

“(1) The college is being stripped of its regulation-making authority to classify trades as compulsory or voluntary, even with the approval of the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

“(2) The judicial appeal from enforcement decisions that exists under the Provincial Offences Act is being removed, and an administrative process with no guarantees of procedural fairness and natural justice is being substituted.”

So where are the rights of a worker in the province of Ontario or of a tradesperson in the province of Ontario, Mr. Speaker?

“(3) Sections 2 and 4 of the act, which constitute the core of the public protection mandate of the college, will be rendered meaningless or unenforceable in a variety of ways. Any violation of the scope of practice of a compulsory trade is permitted.”

So this is very permissive legislation, and it's once again in an omnibus bill. How can this government be trying to do a reset or a rethink about who you are when you bury schedules like this, these poison pills, in omnibus bills? It runs counter to the whole public relations campaign that the Liberal Party is currently undergoing—the “trust us” clause. That trust was gone a long time ago. You can build trust by building legislation which actually is responsive to the needs of Ontario and the small businesses, as I indicated earlier.

This legal opinion goes on to say, and once again I want to thank IBEW for it: “The Liberal Party and others

criticized the federal Conservatives as undemocratic when they adopted a practice of burying significant initiatives in hundreds of pages of appendices to completely unrelated bills.... Such bills normally require expeditious passage.”

Well, this bill is going to pass. I mean, we tried to pull schedules 16 and 17. It's going to pass. We're not going to support it, and we're going to be proud to stand down on this piece of legislation and to vote against schedules and legislation which will hurt the people of this province and undermine worker rights. We're going to be proud to do that, Mr. Speaker.

What we have is a secretive process where everything is in the regulations. Even the people who have been involved in the crafting of the legislation can't answer the questions about how that legislation is going to play itself out.

But I will say that “basic constitutional principles of supremacy of the Legislature dictate that not even the cabinet, much less an appointed subordinate administrative body, should be permitted to overrule the will of the Legislature as expressed in the terms of the statute.”

We have a real problem. It's a systemic issue in this Legislature, where a piece of legislation like a finance bill like Bill 70 can come with a whole hidden agenda, if you will. That door has been left open for privatization of health and safety; there's no doubt about it. This legal opinion has proven helpful for us in determining where the risks are to the people and the workers in Ontario, and why this government has put these two schedules in this finance bill. It certainly begs the question as to where the real motive is. I go back to the Ontario craft distillers: “Tell us, was this intentional? Are you trying to kill our industry on purpose or are you just completely blind to the real needs of the people of Ontario?” That question begs an answer.

OPSEU has been very vocal on workplace safety and privatization over the years, which I can talk about at length, I can tell you, for sure. The contracting out of services across this province and the undermining of good, safe, well-paid jobs have been a concerted effort on the part of this government to embrace precarious part-time contract work with such pure abandonment and sometimes joy. They actually brag about the fact that Ontario has the lowest budget line for services.

Those services and those workers were a valued profession at one point. From the custodians who cleaned our hospitals, to the workers in the cafeterias at our hospitals, to the custodians and the maintenance and the landscaping crews that keep our universities safe and clean: Those used to be good jobs. Not anymore; not in the province of Ontario. The contracting-out door has been wide open and it has been rewarded if you get those people out that door.

So IBEW has raised some good questions, no doubt about it, and OPSEU has raised the issue around occupational health and safety, particularly around schedules 16 and 17. OPSEU says:

“This is bad news for the health and safety of workers in Ontario. Not only could the new health and safety

system standards and overseeing role go outside government”—so then you don't have the responsibility, which is another trend of this government—“but the change would allow the CPO to delegate existing items to outside parties, such as approving certified training providers, certifying worker committee members and collecting and maintaining certification and training information.”

This is a real problem. I've cited research already, but at the end of the day, the new health and safety management system idea—this is from OPSEU—“sidelines joint health and safety participation in the collective voice of workers that” researcher “James Ham noticed as important during the Ham Commission's review of health and safety systems” right back to the 70s. “Ontario's legislation needs to provide workers and joint health and safety committee members and health and safety representatives with more power in their workplaces, not less.” Those workers and their voices in those workplaces need to be empowered.

OPSEU makes a very good point. They go on to say that it can make workplaces more dangerous: “If employers are to receive breaks due to being accredited, such as being relieved from proactive” Ministry of Labour “inspections, workplaces would become more dangerous.”

Proactive Ministry of Labour inspections “act as a deterrence tool in Ontario's prevention system because workplaces can be inspected at any time.” This is the key piece. If you give somebody the heads-up that you're going to come inspect their workplace, they're going to make sure the chemicals are put away and that the workers have the appropriate equipment. It doesn't make any sense.

“The deterrence effect of enforcement has recently been confirmed in a 2016 systematic review of 43 studies by the Institute for Work and Health ... where they found that the government inspections with the potentials for orders and penalties motivate employers to improve health and safety.” Now, isn't that what we want? We want our workplaces to be safer.

You've done one thing with this bill, I have to tell you: You have agitated the activists. Congratulations. An enraged electorate is an engaged electorate. We will be hearing from multiple stakeholders, as I'm sure that you will, on the worker safety issue.

The question still remains: Where is the motivation? Is the motivation to reduce the expenditures? Is the motivation to say that no longer does the government truly have the responsibility because you farmed out the responsibility, just like you did with the CCACs, just like you did with the LHINs, just like you did with Ornge, just like you did with eHealth? The examples go on and on and on.

1740

Even you as individual members must look at this piece of legislation and say, “A few things just don't belong in this legislation. They just don't fit. They stand out. They have no place in ensuring that this province really will be built up for everyone.” The “everyone,”

obviously, was a long-standing afterthought for everyone.

I'll just leave you with one quote from a stakeholder who asked, "Why are skilled trades suddenly being treated differently than other professions? ... Who benefits from lower labour costs and who stands to lose when potentially dangerous work is done by untrained individuals?" Those are good questions around sections 16 and 17.

It is also worth mentioning that the college is governed by skilled trades, both union and non-union, as well as employers and employees. But it also has board members there to protect the public interest. That was always one of the key mandates of the college. Many of the enforcement officers at the college are skilled trades professionals who understand the complexity of the work of skilled trades, like electricians, and can best assess harm. The Wynne government is now taking away the public protection decision-making from the governing body that has the mandate and the knowledge to make those decisions and delegating to a third party whose mandate is to deal with jurisdictional disputes. How many people will have to die in Ontario before you realize that diluting the value of skills and training will cause more harm and risk to workers and to the public?

I have to say, this is a piece of legislation that we cannot support because it doesn't build Ontario up. It doesn't support the small and medium-sized businesses. It's a strong indicator of how disconnected this government is from real Ontarians. It is truly amazing to me that we have this amazing potential, as I mentioned, in schedule 1, of these new craft distillers who are trying to follow their dream, and this government slapped a 61.5% tax on them. How is that in any way supportive? How is that in any way an acknowledgment that this economy will never fully recover without small and medium-sized businesses? The role of government is to support those businesses by being open and transparent—not by these backroom grants that are given through the southwestern development fund, which are invite-only applications, but by being open and transparent and saying, "We recognize the potential of the craft distillers. We understand that there's a direct connection with supporting rural economies and the agricultural sector. We understand that Ontario has so much to offer, that Ontario can be the province that we all hope for and that we all dream of." The small and medium-sized businesses and those dreamers—in this sector, in particular—are meant to have the opportunity, at least, to reach their potential. That's all that we are asking. Don't put a barrier in front of them. Don't put a roadblock in front of a young, up-and-coming distiller who wants to practise his or her craft.

Why this government has gone in this direction is beyond me. I have no good answer. I suspect that the members on that side of the House cannot explain why these two substantive changes in schedules 16 and 17 are here. You can't. There's no good reason. There is no good reason. Yet here we are, debating Bill 70.

New Democrats will not be supporting this piece of legislation because it hurts workers and undermines small and medium-sized businesses and the economy. It once again proves that this government is completely and utterly out of touch with the people who they were elected to serve.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Arthur Potts: It gives me great pleasure to comment on the member from Kitchener–Waterloo, the finance critic for the third party, on Bill 70 and her leadoff address.

I certainly hope she has done better research on the other schedules than she has on schedule 1. To come forward in this House and imply that Bill 70 slaps a new tax of 61.5% on distilled alcohol just simply doesn't represent what the bill is doing. She should understand that that is actually a reduction in taxes from the 139.7% that was normally charged as a markup through LCBO sales to 61.5%, which I see as a significant reduction.

Now, let's be clear: This section of the bill only applies to retailing of distilled alcohol out of a distiller's own premises. There was a concern that they had to sell at the same price as the LCBO if they were selling in their own store, but they would get a 13% markdown in order to afford it, and that just wasn't enough. So this bill has come forward to address a very specific issue with respect to retailing in stores.

To go and read at length from a press release from my good friend Mr. Benoit at the Craft Distillers Association, which has a vested interest attached to it, is not to have done the research appropriately. I would encourage the member to get the facts, because we have continuing negotiations with our government around new opportunities to promote craft cider—the member from Caledon will know that I'm a staunch supporter of doing that—and we need to find a proper way of going forward with this which doesn't offend NAFTA.

As the member knows, all the work that we've done with craft beer happened prior to NAFTA. If you want to go and be haphazard about how you go down the route of changing our rules to mirror those for beer, you put the whole craft beer industry in the province at risk as well.

We're doing it in a measured and responsible way, which I know you appreciate, Speaker. Thank you so much for this opportunity.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: It was a pleasure, actually, to listen to the NDP finance critic from Kitchener–Waterloo. It's very challenging, with an hour of debate, to encapsulate a couple of things in two minutes, but I do want to raise the issue of the elected regional chairs. There's no doubt—I represent half of the region of Peel—that this has some fairly serious repercussions in my own community. As our own finance critic pointed out, the very same day that Bill 70 was introduced, we had municipal affairs and housing legislation that directly speaks to updating the Municipal Act—and we got it in the fall economic

statement bill? It makes no sense. It defies logic, even to the point where, as I understand it, if the municipal affairs bill passes first, then this bill is going to negate some of the new one. Again, both were introduced on the same day. It's beyond bizarre.

I think that the fact that we've tried to throw in so many different pieces of legislation and amendments that have nothing to do with the fall economic statement suggests to me that there's a little bit of—how shall I say?—jerry-rigging in terms of: Why are they putting all of these things in a piece of legislation that is purportedly in reaction and response to the fall economic statement? It's pretty clear, having now looked at it and heard two opposition hour leads, that in fact that is not the case, and we truly have an omnibus bill that's going to need far, far more study.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

1750

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'd like to congratulate our member from Kitchener–Waterloo, who obviously did a very good job, particularly around sections 16 and 17 of Bill 70. I don't understand, quite frankly, why a party that says they support labour is attacking our skilled trades. It makes absolutely no sense in this province to attack skilled trades at a time when we have a shortage of skilled trades. We want to encourage our young people to get involved with skilled trades and let them know that it's a good profession; they make good money. A lot of them are unionized. Some aren't, but a lot are unionized, so you get good benefits.

Then, to top that off, we're trying to encourage young women to get involved with the trades, to get an apprenticeship. What are we doing as a provincial government? We're putting this in a bill attacking workers like IBEW, like the OFL. Some of the members over there, Mr. Speaker, are laughing at this. Can you imagine that the OFL, which governs every unionized worker in the province of Ontario, is coming out and saying it's wrong? Why are you attacking the trades?

Then, if you listen to the OFL, they're talking about section 17, occupational health and safety, and attacking safety in our workplaces from one end of the province to the other. Can you imagine going after worker safety? There's a quote that was read by my colleague, and I think maybe the guy who's laughing on the other side of the House should listen to this. Please listen to this—and my colleagues on the Conservative side: "How many people will have to die in Ontario before you realize that diluting the value of skills and training will cause more harm and risk to workers and to the public?" You understand that. Mr. Speaker, you came out of a steel mill. You know all about health and safety.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Ms. Daiene Vernile: I'm actually very grateful to have the opportunity to offer some facts on the budget bill this afternoon that we're debating.

I've mentioned this to you before, that I spent over three decades working as a news journalist where, every day, I had to research and collect and report the facts, but here in the Legislature this afternoon, there seems to be this willful attempt to ignore the facts. So let me take this opportunity to offer some facts.

The member for Kitchener–Waterloo talked about the LCBO and craft distillers, and my colleague the member for Beaches–East York mentioned that under the old system, producers received a 13% commission from the LCBO. Under the new system, it's 20%. That is significantly better, and they're happy to get that.

Because of the changes that we brought in, in my region of Waterloo there have been quite a few new breweries that have popped up. They decided to hang their shingle in our community, despite what you've heard. They include Abe Erb, Bitte Schön Brauhaus, Block Three—by the way, I visited them not too long ago with the agriculture minister, when we connected with them on a Southwestern Ontario Development Fund grant. They were happy to get that funding.

There's Brew Donkey, Descendants, Grand River Brewing in Cambridge, Waterloo Brewing and Innocente Brewing. They contacted me when they were trying to get their product into the LCBO, and I'm happy to say that their fine product is now available at the LCBO. So, despite what you heard this afternoon, there are many new craft distillers that have started business in Kitchener–Waterloo.

Speaker, a few more facts: A member for the KW chamber of commerce recently came before our finance committee, and I quote him. He used to be a staffer for Mike Harris. He's a long-time Conservative. He said, "The Ontario economy right now is smoking hot." I agree with him. Good money management is leading us to the path to balance in prosperity in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Kitchener–Waterloo has two minutes to respond to the comments.

Interjections.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I just heard a very funny—I don't know. There's smoking going on in the place, but I don't know what they're smoking.

I want to thank the members from Niagara, Beaches–East York, Dufferin–Caledon and Kitchener Centre. The member from Beaches–East York, though, has called into question my research. I've been following the issue of craft distillers, so it's different than the craft brewers, just so that the member from Kitchener Centre understands that. They've been writing to the Secretariat for the Premier's Advisory Council on Government Assets. They thought they were part of this conversation all along. They've made the point that, "Taxing as a percentage of a distillery's wholesale price is absolutely crushing to small-scale distilling and innovative quality small batch offerings."

They have made the case for a graduated rate that reflects the basic fact that the profit from the early

production of any grain-to-glass brewery or distillery will be immediately reinvested in local operations. I would urge the member from Beaches–East York to go back to his friend, perhaps, if that friend is still a friend, and ask him, when he says this tax is very anti-small business, what exactly does he mean by that? My point is that this government doesn't understand the importance of small and medium-sized businesses in the province of Ontario. Introducing an oppressive tax like this, while not giving those distillers a fighting chance to be successful, is another story.

The workers' safety, the occupational health and safety issues that I've talked mostly about, though—nobody spoke to those because they don't have a leg to stand on. This legislation hurts workers in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you.
Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): It being four minutes to 6, this House stands adjourned until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1756.

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Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe-Grey	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Wong, Soo (LIB)	Scarborough-Agincourt	Deputy Speaker / Vice-présidente
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Première ministre Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke	
Yurek, Jeff (PC)	Elgin-Middlesex-London	
Zimmer, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Willowdale	Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation / Ministre des Relations avec les Autochtones et de la Réconciliation
Vacant	Niagara West-Glanbrook / Niagara-Ouest-Glanbrook	
Vacant	Ottawa-Vanier	

**STANDING COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
COMITÉS PERMANENTS DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Standing Committee on Estimates / Comité permanent des budgets des dépenses

Chair / Présidente: Cheri DiNovo
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Monique Taylor
Bob Delaney, Cheri DiNovo
Joe Dickson, Han Dong
Michael Harris, Sophie Kiwala
Arthur Potts, Todd Smith
Monique Taylor
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Eric Rennie

**Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs /
Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques**

Chair / Président: Peter Z. Milczyn
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Ann Hoggarth
Yvan Baker, Toby Barrett
Han Dong, Victor Fedeli
Catherine Fife, Ann Hoggarth
Cristina Martins, Peter Z. Milczyn
Lou Rinaldi
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Eric Rennie

**Standing Committee on General Government / Comité
permanent des affaires gouvernementales**

Chair / Président: Grant Crack
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Lou Rinaldi
Yvan Baker, Mike Colle
Grant Crack, Lisa Gretzky
Ann Hoggarth, Harinder Malhi
Jim McDonell, Lou Rinaldi
Lisa M. Thompson
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przewdziecki

**Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité
permanent des organismes gouvernementaux**

Chair / Présidente: Cristina Martins
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Daiene Vernile
James J. Bradley, Raymond Sung Joon Cho
Wayne Gates, Monte Kwinter
Amrit Mangat, Cristina Martins
Randy Pettapiece, Shafiq Qadri
Daiene Vernile
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przewdziecki

**Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de
la justice**

Chair / Président: Shafiq Qadri
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Lorenzo Berardinetti
Lorenzo Berardinetti, Mike Colle
Bob Delaney, Randy Hillier
Michael Mantha, Arthur Potts
Shafiq Qadri, Laurie Scott
Daiene Vernile
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell

**Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly / Comité
permanent de l'Assemblée législative**

Chair / Président: Monte McNaughton
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Steve Clark
Granville Anderson, Robert Bailey
James J. Bradley, Steve Clark
Vic Dhillon, Sophie Kiwala
Michael Mantha, Monte McNaughton
Soo Wong
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

**Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent
des comptes publics**

Chair / Président: Ernie Hardeman
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Lisa MacLeod
John Fraser, Ernie Hardeman
Percy Hatfield, Monte Kwinter
Lisa MacLeod, Harinder Malhi
Peter Z. Milczyn, Julia Munro
Arthur Potts
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

**Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité
permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Joe Dickson
Lorenzo Berardinetti, Grant Crack
Joe Dickson, Jennifer K. French
Ted McMeekin, Mario Sergio
Bill Walker, Soo Wong
Jeff Yurek
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell

**Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de
la politique sociale**

Chair / Président: Peter Tabuns
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jagmeet Singh
Granville Anderson, Lorne Coe
Vic Dhillon, John Fraser
Amrit Mangat, Gila Martow
Ted McMeekin, Jagmeet Singh
Peter Tabuns
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch